

THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

EUGÉNIE M. FRYER



nia

3.00 - 7

Irene Owen Andrews
Oct. 1924

Who st
when a ...
s particularl
ponders the s
hipped gabl
steps that le
his al
ce w

th that
face

THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE



Façade of the Cathedral of Notre Dame Le Puy
[*Frontispiece*]

THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

BY
EUGÉNIE M. FRYER

ILLUSTRATED BY
ROY L. HILTON



NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & CO.
681 FIFTH AVENUE

COPYRIGHT, 1917,
By E. P. DUTTON & CO.

Printed in the United States of America

TO
THE MEMORY
OF MY
FATHER AND MOTHER

2038652

PREFACE

TWO people never see a thing from exactly the same angle, nor in describing it present the same viewpoint; so out of something old we are constantly getting something new. France has been pictured in a variety of ways, as a whole, in sections, or by dealing with some specific subject such as its cathedrals, its châteaux, its literary landmarks. Yet as far as I know, France has never been approached from the viewpoint of its hill-towns.

These hill-towns are of four distinct types: first, the large town, commanded and protected by the turrets and massive towers of its walls and citadel; second, the feudal castle, the residence of some great lord about whose walls a straggling town has grown up; third, the fortified town, communal in character, which, governed by no over-lord and possessed of no castle, yet protects itself from invasion by fortifying its houses and its churches also; fourth, the monastic hill-town, its defences built primarily to defend a shrine.

These four types are found throughout France, revealing certain local differences subject to their location in France; portraying likewise through their architecture the temper, the ideals, the very soul of the people who fashioned them.

In studying these hill-towns, it is also interesting to note two distinct ideas in the use made of the feudal castle. The Norman castle was built first of all for the protection of the people, and was in fact the rude cradle of our nationalism. The French castle, such as Loches for example, was in its early existence the stronghold of the robber baron, a place of protection whither he might flee after his marauding expeditions against the weak and unwary.

Mrs. Champney has said "that the homes of a people are bound up with the history of a people." Thus in tracing the history of these four types of hill-towns in France, I have endeavoured while portraying the local temper and ideals of the people, to trace also the welding of these divergent strands into the united whole which is the wonderful French nation of to-day; for France is composed of many races, distinct in type, in temper and in the expression of their ideals. Yet in the fundamental ideal of democracy that underlies all their surface differences, they are united.

The awakening in the eleventh century to a sense of nationalism was a turning point in the history of France. This sense of national unity has steadily broadened, deepened and developed until to-day it is the bedrock of the nation. Democracy is the ideal for which France has fought and bled nationally and sectionally since that first eleventh century vision of "Liberté, Fraternité. Égalité,"—an ideal that the French worship with all the passionate devotion of the mediæval mystic; an ideal for which France is fighting to-day with a grimness of determination unequaled in her history. For this ideal, into which has crept a certain universality, France will die; she will never surrender.

Thus in these four types of hill-towns found in France we see the rich variety of the temper and ideals that went to the making of the French nation; while the various types of architecture that one finds in these hill-towns reveal the soul of the people who dwelt within their walls, giving the key often to the hidden and subtle influences that went to the moulding of their individual characteristics.

For permission to reprint these articles, most of which have appeared from time to time in "The Book News Monthly," I wish to express my deep

appreciation to the editor, Norma Bright Carson, not only for her courtesy in this, but also for the never-failing consideration she has always shown me.

Five of these articles appeared some years ago in the pages of "The Church Standard." When it ceased to be published, the editor courteously gave me full rights to re-publish them. I would therefore express here my grateful acknowledgment.

EUGÉNIE M. FRYER.

Philadelphia,
April 26, 1917.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THREE HILL-TOWNS OF POITOU: .	1
I. Poitiers.	1
II. Chauvigny and Uzerche. . .	9
II. FOUR HILL-TOWNS OF NORMANDY:	19
I. Falaise.	19
II. Gaillard.	29
III. Arques-la-Bataille.	39
IV. Mont-Saint-Michel	49
III. FOUR HILL-TOWNS OF BRITTANY:	63
I. Saint-Jean-du-Doigt.	63
II. La Faouët.	73
III. Dinan and Josselin.	85
IV. TWO HILL-TOWNS OF QUERCY: .	101
I. Cahors.	101
II. Rocamadour.	114
V. THREE HILL-TOWNS OF LANGUE-	
DOC:	129
I. Najac, Carcassonne, Lastours.	129

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
VI. THREE HILL-TOWNS OF PROvence:	143
I. Arles.	143
II. Montmajour and Les Baux. .	155
VII. A HILL-TOWN OF SAVOIE: . . .	165
Miolans.	165
VIII. A HILL-TOWN OF AUVERGNE: . .	175
Le Puy.	175
IX. A HILL-TOWN OF PICARDIE: . .	187
Laon.	187
X. A HILL-TOWN OF LA BEAUCE: .	201
Chartres.	201
XI. FOUR HILL-TOWNS OF TOURAINE: .	213
I. Chinon.	213
II. Amboise.	224
III. Blois.	235
IV. Loches.	248

MR. HILTON'S ILLUSTRATIONS

1.	POITIERS.	Notre-Dame: le Portail	6
2.	CHAUVIGNY.	Château des Evêques	10
3.	UZERCHE.	Town Gate	17
4.	FALAISE.	Le Moulin Bigot	21
5.	"	Château: La Fenêtre de Robert-le-Diable	22
6.	"	St. Gervais	27
7.	GAILLARD.	Château: the Casemates	31
8.	"	Abbey of Bon Port	34
9.	ARQUES-LA-BATAILLE.	Chapel Ruins at Radepont	47
10.	MONT-SAINT-MICHEL.	Town Gate	53
11.	"	Abbey	55
12.	"	Cloisters	57
13.	"	Abbey: la Salle des Chevaliers	59
14.	ST. JEAN-DU-DOIGT.	The Church Gateway	68
15.	LA FAOUËT.	Road leading into the Town	74
16.	"	Tower of St. Barbe	75
17.	"	The Market Place	79
18.	"	Chapel of St. Fiacre	81
19.	"	Rood Screen: St. Fiacre	82
20.	DINAN.	Château de la Duchesse Anne	89
21.	CAHORS.	Rue de l'Université	107
22.	"	Fenêtre Renaissance, Rue des Boulevards	109
23.	ROCAMADOUR.	Stone Staircase leading to the Sanctuaries	118
24.	"	Chapel Saint Michel: within the Sanctuaries	121
25.	"	The Sanctuaries	123
26.	NAJAC.	Street and Château	131

27.	CARCASSONNE.	Walls from Tour Visigoth, La Cité	133
28.	"	Porte Narbonnaise	135
29.	LASTOURS.	Château Quertinheux: Chapel of St. Catherine	139
30.	ARLES.	Greek Theatre	145
31.	"	Roman Amphitheatre	146
32.	"	West Door: Saint Trophime	150
33.	"	Cloisters, Saint Trophime	151
34.	"	Cloisters, Saint Trophime: Statue of Saint Trophime	152
35.	"	Cloisters, Saint Trophime: XIIth Century Capital	153
36.	MONTMAJOUR.	Abbey Ruins	156
37.	MIOLANS.	Château: Tour Saint Pierre	171
38.	LE PUY.	Distant View of Saint-Michel-Aiguilhe	183
39.	"	Doorway, Saint-Michel-Aiguilhe	184
40.	LAON.	The Cathedral (Exterior)	192
41.	"	The Cathedral (Interior)	194
42.	"	Colonnades du Palais de Justice	197
43.	"	L'Eglise Saint Martin	199
44.	CHARTRES.	Cathedral Doors	205
45.	AMBOISE.	Château: Interior of St. Hubert's Chapel	225
46.	"	Doorway, St. Hubert's Chapel	227
47.	BLOIS.	Gate to the Château	239
48.	"	Château: l'Attique	241
49.	LOCHES.	Clock Tower	251
50.	"	The Donjon	253

LIST OF PLATES

LE PUY. The Façade of the Cathedral	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
CHAUVIGNY. Capitals in the Church of St. Peter	14
UZERCHE. General View	16
FALAISE. The Château from Mont Myra	20
GAILLARD. General View	29
ARQUES-LA-BATAILLE. The Château	41
MONT-SAINT-MICHEL. The Mount	50
ST. JEAN-DU-DOIGT. The Procession	69
JOSSELIN. The Château: Western Façade	94
“ The Château: Renaissance Façade	97
CAHORS. Pont Valentré (Devil's Bridge)	110
ROCAMADOUR. View from the Valley	116
ARLES. Bull Fight in the Roman Amphitheatre	147
MIOLANS. Château	165
LE PUY. Cathedral Cloisters	181
“ Polignac	185
LAON. General View	188
CHARTRES. The Cathedral	204
“ Carvings on the Choir Wall	206
CHINON. Exterior of Chinon	217
AMBOISE. View from the River	224
BLOIS. Colonnade in the Wing of Louis XII	236
“ Foot of Staircase of Francis I	240
LOCHES. The Château	249
“ Porch of Saint Ours	250
“ The Tomb of Agnès Sorel	256
“ The Oratory of Anne of Brittany	258

THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

I

THREE HILL-TOWNS OF POITOU

I. POITIERS

ONE hears much collectively and separately of the hill-towns of Italy—of their beauty, of their picturesqueness, of their important part in the making of Italian mediæval history. But except for scattered instances, the hill-towns of France have passed unnoticed and unsung. Yet, scanning the pages of that marvellous Golden Age, packed with its deeds of valour, of chivalry and romance, is it not found that it is these same hill-towns that have more or less shaped the current of these events? That by their exalted position they have of necessity commanded situations, and thus controlled vital issues? Perhaps in no other age was the hill-town such a paramount necessity.

Wandering through France to-day, one finds these hoary records of this bygone age, towns about which cluster amid the moss-grown, mouldering stones, the half-obliterated pages that add

2 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

their share to the history of France. And in them one finds four distinct types: first, the large town, commanded and protected by the turrets and massive towers of its walls and citadel; second, the feudal castle, the residence of some great lord about whose walls a straggling town has grown up; third, the fortified town, communal in character, which, governed by no over-lord, and possessed of no castle, yet protects itself from invasion not only by outer walls, but by fortifying its houses and its churches also; fourth, the monastic hill-town, its defences built primarily to defend a shrine.

Poitiers, a hill-town of the first type, the large hill-town, stands picturesquely upon a rugged hill encircled by a valley threaded by the Clain and the tributary Boivre, a fertile, undulating valley studded with sharply rising slopes, with broad faces or tall pinnacles of rock. Along the southern side, where the eighteenth century Parc de Blossac commands a fine view of the Clain Valley, the crumbling fourteenth century ramparts, flanked with towers, reveal the outgrown strength of this mediæval town. The tortuous streets, bordered with quaint mediæval houses, climb and twist up the hill, and lead into several irregular squares, and to four or five Romanesque churches

remarkable for their local character as for their wide diversity among themselves. In the centre of the town rises one of the most beautiful examples of mediæval, secular architecture extant—the Gothic château of the comtes de Poitou, the guardian of the ancient city.

The history of this château dates back to Gallo-Roman times, and was built by the Carlovingians upon the Gallo-Roman city foundations. Destroyed several times, it was rebuilt at the commencement of the eleventh century by William the Great, but of this construction nothing remains. Again rebuilt, it was again destroyed by the English in 1346, this time by fire. But coming again into the possession of the French, it was subsequently restored in 1395 by Jean duc de Berry et comte du Poitou, a brother of Charles V. He not only rebuilt the gable of the great hall and decorated the superb chimney that covers one end of this vaulted chamber, but he also restored the magnificent keep, a veritable château, unique of its kind, possessing a great hall in each of its three vaulted stories, and rooms in its four massive flanking towers.

From earliest times, the history of France centred about this battlemented keep. Across its drawbridge Charles Martel led his army to grap-

4 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

ple with the Saracen hosts, those same Saracens who have left their influence deep pressed upon arch and pediment, that touch of the East that one finds at Le Puy, Perigueux and in Provence also. It was here that Charlemagne administered justice, here that in later times Charles VII. was proclaimed King of France, and that Jeanne d'Arc was questioned by the learned doctors. Thus we see gathered about this city on a hill not only the history of France, but we see also some of the exotic influences that went to the moulding of its architectural individuality. This we see primarily in its cathedral and churches, and through them we may catch glimpses of the people who wielded so potent a force in the making of France.

As it is true that when one steps into Poitou one finds a new type of people, a people dark of hue and touched with southern picturesqueness, a people whose very speech reveals remnants of the *Langue d'Oc*, so one finds there also a new type of architecture, an exotic from the Far East, an offspring, at least, of Indo-European devices, born in that age when the Saracens inundated Spain, and swept like a great tidal wave across the Pyrenees into France, leaving behind them these traces of their influence.

There was another source from which Poitevin

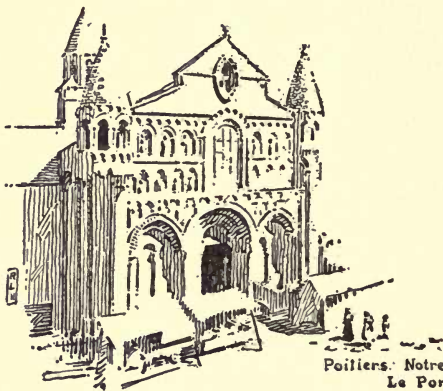
architects drew their inspiration—the Romans. Studying the intersecting Romanesque vaults which had developed not from Byzantine, but from the unribbed, intersecting vault of the Romans, they amalgamated these structural ideas with those Byzantine domes as revealed in the cathedral of St. Front, in Périgueux. Thus, the ribbed dome descended from the true Byzantine dome, and yet as plainly confessed its indebtedness to those districts where domes were never used, but where Gothic art was born.

Again, in the decoration of these churches, especially of Notre Dame la Grande, we note that while the Poitevin sculptor drew from both these sources, yet he had no such profusion of originals from which to copy as had his Provençal neighbour. Therefore we find a more naïve quality in the early Poitevin sculpture than in the Provençal of the same period; we find it more elemental and barbaric both in conception and composition, less skilfully and finely wrought; an almost grotesque mingling of the East and the West, yet an individual expression, a “naturalistic portraiture” that lifted it to heights that the more servile Provençal students of antique precedent never reached.

In St. Radegonde, named after the Merovingian queen who preferred the solitude of the cloister

6 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

and the halo of the saint to sharing the golden crown of her barbaric husband, we find another type of Romanesque church. In direct contrast to the vaults of Notre Dame la Grande, which are semicircular in section like more northerly districts, the ceiling of St. Radegonde consists of a



Poitiers: Notre-Dame
Le Portail

series of domical vaults after the Angevin manner, spanning the wide, simple space, while high-placed windows rise above the blank arcades that enrich the walls. Thus, unlike the ill-lighted church of Notre Dame, which is dependent on its aisle windows and its domical lantern for light, St. Radegonde is flooded with the soft,

mellow sunlight that enhances the beauty of its century-worn carvings, and fills the place with a brooding sense of peace.

In the cathedral of St. Pierre we see the blending of Notre Dame la Grande and St. Radegonde—the local Romanesque church, with its nave flanked by aisles of almost equal height, magnified and exalted by that deepened knowledge of vaulting that the ingenious architects, through Anjou, had gathered from Perigueux. While the exterior is heavy and unimpressive, the interior is rich, spacious, luminous. The walls are high, and the windows very large; the aisles are so broad that the curve of the vaults does not shut out the light. In effect, then, the interior is vigorous yet slender; buoyant and airy, yet majestic—the Romanesque reaching up anticipant of the winged flights of the Gothic. It is, in fact, the last word of the Romanesque in Western France, the last word likewise of indigenous art in Poitou. For it was at this time that Poitou became absorbed into the domain of royal France, its personality merging with those new elements to be finally dominated by them.

The carving of the tympana of the canopied choir stalls is very fine. In one of the corbels of the roof we find a sculptured figure in stone, bear-

8 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

ing in its arms a compass and a T-square, proving beyond a doubt a connection between Masonic craft and church building in the Middle Ages.

The Temple de St. Jean, dating back to the fourth century, is a relic of Roman times, a link between the classic of ancient Rome and the Romanesque. It is a rectangular building with a rudely-conceived arcade, used originally as a baptistry, and is one of the oldest in France. It is interesting to note, that until comparatively recently, the primitive form of baptism by immersion was preserved in this old baptistry. And from this gaunt relic with its rude arches and carvings, the Poitevin architects doubtless drew some of their inspiration.

We see, then, Poitiers, a hill-town of the first type, its château and crumbling, battlemented wall and towers guarding still the treasures of its past—those accumulated treasures of valiant deeds and hard-earned victories that its giant strength in former days won for France. Above all, it guards those architectural treasures—treasures that portray the exotic influences that went to the moulding of its architectural individuality.

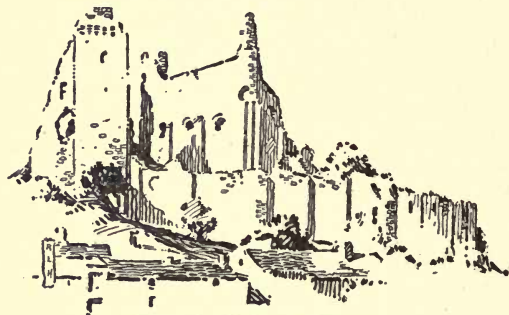
II. CHAUVIGNY AND UZERCHE

THE charm of life lies in its unexpectedness—the sudden rift in the mist that reveals to us some hitherto unknown country. If one follows the ambling, sparkling Vienne, one will come without warning upon a quaint, mediæval town that scrambles up the rough, rock-hewn hill, seeking the protection of the four gaunt châteaux that spread their crumbling massiveness along the crest—their greyness melting into the cloud-swept sky, a picture full of soft, mystic beauty. In this little town of Chauvigny, a hill-town of the second type—the feudal type—there is no suggestion of the present. It broods rather in the afterglow of past glory, past achievements. Unlike Poitiers, Chauvigny owes its birth and its existence to its baronial château, for it was about the feudal château of the Bishops of Poitiers that the straggling town grew up. This is further evidenced by the fact of there being two towns, the upper town that lies within the outer castle walls, and which is much older than the

10 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

lower town, which lies outside the castle walls, and which is spoken of as the new town despite its mediæval birth.

The upper town clusters about the four great châteaux that stretch along the ridge of the hill, the baronial château of the Bishops of Poitiers,



Château des Evêques, Chauvigny.

the Château d'Harcourt, the Château de Mont-léon, and the Château de Gouzon, the last three having been either fiefs of the bishops, or acquired by them through purchase or exchange. The hill, commanding, as it does, two sides of the valley, made their position in point of defence strategically perfect, and well-nigh impregnable; a great necessity when one remembers that during the Hundred Years' War Chauvigny was

from its situation a forced participant in events of which Poitou was the theatre. To one standing there to-day, looking off across the beautiful wooded valley set in myriad greens—oaks, locusts and poplars—the blue-gold Vienne winding its way northward to lose itself among the hills, the present fades. The past looms up vividly—Sir John Chandos with his English hosts, their armour flashing in the sunlight, sweeping across the plain toward Chauvigny; or, perchance, the French army commanded by the duc de Berry and the gallant connétable du Guesclin laying siege to these rock-bound castles, an event which took place in 1372. Later still Chauvigny took her part in the religious wars, occupied sometimes by the rebel prince, the Marquis Charles de la Roche-Posay, the Protestant adherent; sometimes by the Catholic duc de Roannez, as the fortunes of war gave the upper hand to Protestant or Catholic.

There were but two approaches to the châteaux, one from the lower town, a steep, winding way that led to the Porte des Piliers, a massive gateway flanked with towers. The second approach was from the river, a narrow and arduous ascent likewise. The baronial château is the earliest, as it is the largest and most imposing of the four châteaux, its square-faced donjon dating from the

12 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

beginning of the eleventh century. Its "Château Neuf" is of much later date—fourteenth century—designed, it would seem, with an eye to beauty as well as strength. The older part of the castle came into the possession of the Bishops of Poitiers, a deed of gift from Isembert I., Bishop of Poitiers from 1019-1047, a scion of the ancient family of Chauvigny-Châteauroux. From that time until the end of the seventeenth century, when they abandoned the château, the Bishops reigned over the destinies of Chauvigny, powerful feudal lords, wielding this power with no uncertain hand, and oftentimes to their own aggrandisement. High up in a mass of broken wall in the "Château Neuf," a part of the chapel of St. Michel can still be seen, a bit of late Gothic, exquisite in spite of its incompleteness. A series of subterranean passages is found in the "Château Neuf" also, passages that lead from one tower to another, to open out into the moat, or beneath the ramparts by means of a carefully concealed postern.

As the Château des Evêques, as it is sometimes called, dominates the lower town, so its neighbour the Château d'Harcourt dominates the valley of the Fontaine Talbat, a tiny stream that winds about the base of the hill. The great tower dates

from the thirteenth century, and contains a sort of vaulted crypt, unique of its kind, that was used in the old days as the seigneurial prison. In the flooring above, there were curiously barred wooden trap doors bound in iron, and a flue led from the dungeon to this upper room, enabling the conversation of the prisoners to be overheard. Originally the château belonged to the vicomtes de Chatellerault, but near the end of the thirteenth century it passed by marriage to the Harcourts. Sold in 1447 to Charles d'Anjou, Comte du Maine, it passed two months later into the hands of the Bishops of Poitiers in exchange for another seigneurie.

The other two châteaux, Montléon, which has been a ruin since the fifteenth century, and Gouzon, a massive square keep like that of Loches, are bound up more or less with the history of the other two. Like the Château d'Harcourt, they derived their names from families who were strangers to the country, and like it they eventually fell under the dominion of their powerful neighbour—the Bishop of Poitiers, also.

But, after all, the glory of Chauvigny, like the glory of Poitiers, rests with its churches, especially the remarkable eleventh-century church of St. Pierre, standing close to the frowning grey-

14 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

ness of the Donjon de Gouzon—a hoary relic enshrining within its heart the wonder, the exotic richness and beauty of Poitevin architecture, in truth, the noblest example of them all. For at St. Pierre we see a remarkable specimen of the early Romanesque, far surpassing in its richly-carved capitals at least, either Notre Dame la Grande or St. Radegonde. Each chapel roof is a compressed dome, but with no suggestion of the groined vaulting. In the curiously sculptured capitals of the choir pillars we find surely a barbaric largeness, an elemental boldness and vigour, both in conception and execution, that harks from the East. The subjects are taken largely from the Apocalypse, although the Annunciation, the birth of Christ, the Adoration of the Magi and the Presentation in the Temple are all represented. The most curious of all were the monster winged beasts that so distinctly bespoke Egypt and Assyria, that grotesque quality so suggestive of the East with its weird, strange beauty, its mysticism, its symbolism. The Saracen tidal wave that swept into France in the days of Charles Martel, has undoubtedly left the indelible imprint of its passing upon those carven capitals.

Standing once more by the Château des Evêques, I watched the shadows creep across the val-



Chauvigny, Pillar Capitals in Church of St. Pierre

ley. An old couple wandered up the street, the twilight peace reflected in their fine ruddy faces. A quaint, flaring cap framed the woman's face; the old man trudged along, a wooden grain sickle over his shoulder—a Millet picture truly. Far below echoed faintly the sleepy drone of daily life—the mallet of the stone cutter, the clatter of a cart over the roughshod streets, the mysterious purr of hidden waterways. But up here among the ruins, in the rustle of the fig tree clinging to the donjon wall, one caught the deeper murmur of a mighty past, voicing the present even among its crumbling greatness.

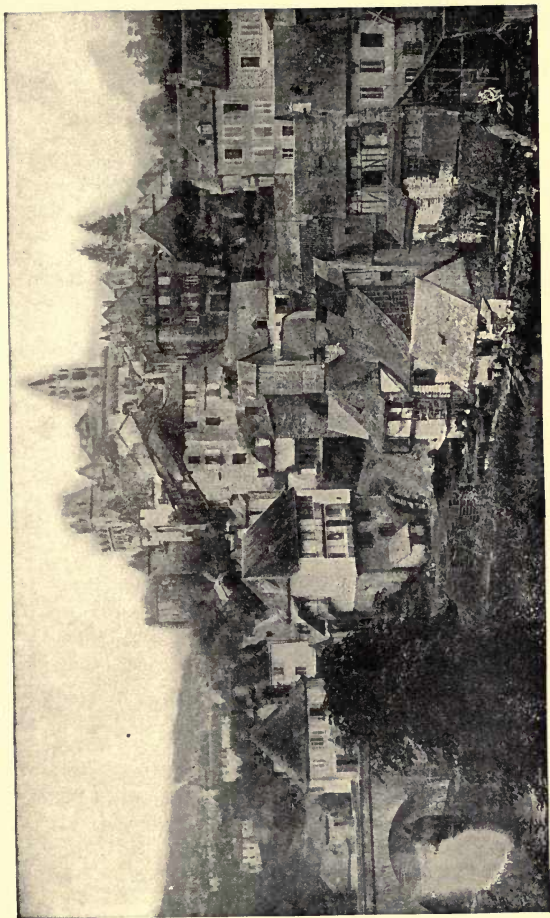
Tucked away in the heart of the Limousin mountains, the little hill-town of Uzerche lies basking in the sunset glow of mediævalism. It represents the third type—the communal hill-town—its fortified houses clinging to the cliff and flinging defiance to the robber baron who made bold to assail its bristling fortifications. Uzerche stands upon a jagged promontory, formed by a cut in the hills through which the Vézère winds. The Vézère is a sparkling little river like its sister Vienne, its joyous laughter mingling oddly with the languorous murmur of the over-shadowing locust and beech trees—a gleeful note of melody

16 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

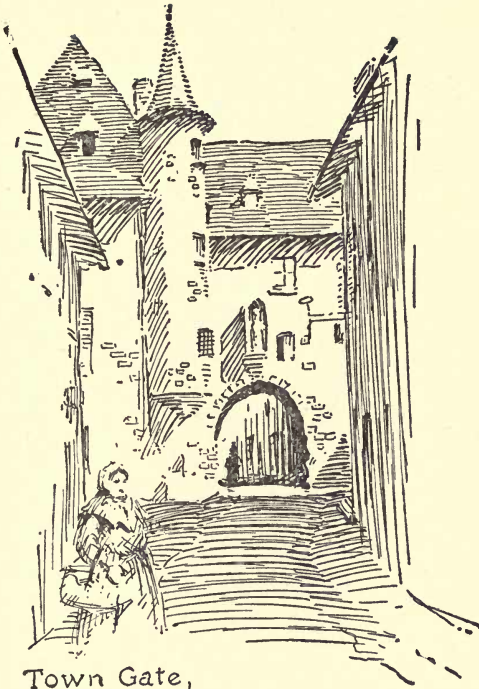
interwoven with the haunting, mystic sighing of zephyrs wafted from beyond the Pyrenees.

Balconied houses overhang steep slopes and deep green meadows, while here and there rough-hewn steps lead down the precipitous hillside to the river, where one gets a good view of the crumbling fourteenth-century walls, walls flanked by stern, dark towers against whose grimness a solemn poplar rises tall and slim. In the distance a straggling line of timbered houses is outlined against the purple and gold sunset sky, another touch of picturesqueness, another suggestion of the far-off Pyrenees, even as the southern breeze comes burdened with the perfumed breath of flowers.

The profusion of flowers everywhere, the balconied houses with their battlemented turrets, the swarthy, velvety-eyed peasants, clad in corduroys, tam-o'-shanters, and broad, red sashes, the cheery indolence, bespeak the south, Spain with its rich profusion, its beauty, its picturesqueness, its brightness. Along the steep, straight road, yokes of cream-coloured oxen toil patiently, urged on by the cracking of the long whips, and the mellow "ay-e" of their masters. Up and up they go, along the village street and through the old town gate to the square where stands the century-worn



Uzerche



Town Gate,
Uzerche.

18 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

church like some grim-armoured knight who even now dares not cast aside his weapons. For Uzerche, unlike Poitiers and Chauvigny, possessed no château, but was dependent for defence upon its fortified church and houses.

The history of Uzerche lies buried with its past. On its deeds of arms we can only speculate, for the record of its glory is graven neither in stone, nor illumined upon parchment. It lies brooding in the sunset glow, brooding with tenderness upon its past fraught with deeds of which perchance it is too proud to speak, its daily, slow-moving life tuned to the dreamy song of its sparkling river, to the low, haunting music of the wind sighing in the beech trees. And though Uzerche cannot boast of such deeds of national significance as echo still at Poitiers and Chauvigny, though she can point to no such architectural feats as Notre Dame la Grande or St. Pierre, yet she is from her communal character of vital national significance, standing as she has even from her birth, for that democracy that is the strength of the France of to-day.

II

FOUR HILL-TOWNS OF NORMANDY

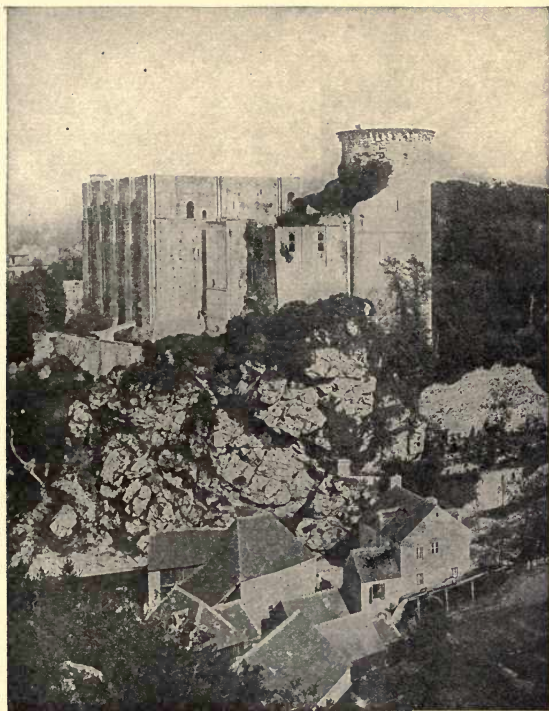
I. FALAISE

FRANCE is vitally alive. Yet the pulse-beat of her very modernity throbs with the glory of her past. Thus one finds amid the calm whirr of modern thrift the echo of a past that was and is, the atmosphere still pregnant with romance and steeped in mediævalism undisturbed by modernity; resting on its arms, as it were, in the afterglow of stirring deeds and heroisms. Thus Falaise represents the heart of feudalism, despite the thumb-mark of modern life that imprints itself here and there upon its crumbling greyness; modernity the outgrowth rooted in the ivy-clad walls of William the Conqueror's donjon keep—the same donjon of which Pierre David wrote:

"Ce donjon si longtemps par la guerre habité
Voyez-le comme un aigle ouvrant ses aisles grises,
Cramponner sur le sol, ses ongles rocailleux."

20 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

Both town and castle stand upon a cliff, as its very name proclaims, set apart by an entourage of walls flanked by bastians and double gateways massive in their stolidity. The town straggles down the lower end of the cliff from the *Porte des Cordeliers*, the main entrance to the castle: thus the "Cliff-town" set upon this boat-shaped spur of rock, commands domination over the plains and lowlands broken here and there by vast tracks of virginal forest; the very key, indeed, to the heart of lower Normandy. It is set in the seclusion of the *Val d'Ante*, scarce bordering the main thoroughfares of life, shut in by mighty trees that set it forever apart within a sacred grove of druid oaks; for tradition has it that in the far-off unrecorded days Druids did worship and make sacrifice where now the grim old keep so proudly stands. But even as a river finds its source in the heart of the hills, so in the hidden valleys, often, greatness has its birth. And in the heart of the low Norman hills of *Calvados* a conqueror first saw the golden sunshine flickering through the orchards of the *Val d'Ante*,—the *Val d'Ante* that clings to the skirts of the ancient keep hanging grim upon the cliff, seeking thus the protection of its foster mother. For *Falaise*, despite its austerity, presents a kindliness of aspect, a brooding



Falaise. View of the Château from Mont Myra

quality akin to tenderness, that we feel, as it stands there holding within its arms the little Falaisian town of huddling houses and quaint streets, tossing, at least, the crumbs of its protection to this tiny hamlet crouching at its feet; the hamlet where dwelt Arlette, the tanner's daughter, the



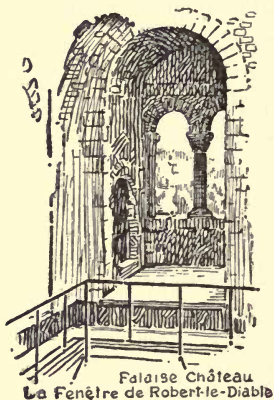
Le Moulin Bigot, Falaise

beautiful young girl of the people whom destiny ordained as mother of a conqueror; a destiny revealed to her in a dream—so says a trouvère—that from her would spring a tree to overshadow England and Normandy.

A rough, winding road leads up to the Porte des Cordeliers, and from the grass-grown walls one gets splendid views of the château, so full of the strength and stateliness of the Conqueror,

22 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

his rude kindliness of spirit impregnating the place he loved so well. From the round-arched double window cut high in the donjon wall, the guide will point out the "Fontaine d'Arlette" far below, and in his quaint, homely way tell the century-



Falaise Château
La Fenêtre de Robert-le-Diable

worn tale of Robert the Magnificent's first glimpse of the peasant girl—gay, beautiful, singing with the "free, careless rapture" of a thrush in May—who was to give his heart no rest till he had plucked the wild flower growing amid the brown barrenness of a tannery. Across the Val d'Ante that clus-

tered at our feet, its tiny streets tortuous in their windings, its time-stained, red-tiled roofs moss-grown in greens and browns, one catches a glimpse of St. Gervais rising with Norman stateliness of mien above the low, timbered houses; while beyond one is lost amid the charm of fields soft glowing green, poplar lined or bordered by towering oaks and fruit trees heavy with bloom. Flow-

ers, too, lurked like fairies in the grass, the whole country vibrant with the rapturous note of spring. Close beside the window is a tiny vaulted room, to which tradition points as William's birthplace; "not luxurious," as the guide humorously remarked, "but the dark room was good for the baby's eyes."

Falaise dates from the tenth century, its primitiveness of type marked by its elemental simplicity of design, the rude, wide-jointed masonry, the rubble work and the rough hewing of the stones that set its massive, thick-built walls and frowning towers all proving it of early date. Norman work, touched by the crudeness of the primitive, it is undoubtedly, and here, while we find traces of Roman influence, we may search in vain for the Byzantine character of work that has chased designs of refinement and of ornamentation upon the rugged walls of Gaillard and of those other castles of a century later, giving them a gay, mocking air that is foreign to Falaise; for Falaise, though she frowns forebodingly at her enemies and smiles upon her friends, yet sternness and benevolence replace the mocking defiance of her more ornate sisters, the rude kindness of the primitive still clinging about her as a mantle.

Like all earlier castles, Falaise's strength cen-

24 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

tres in the great keep rising above the guerdon of towered and bastianed walls, which in turn are surrounded by a moat, thus completing the isolation of its rough-hewn setting upon the boat-shaped spur of rock that rises up sheer and in uncompromising attitude, girded by the bristling heights of Noron and Mont Myra, the outposts of its main defences. These bold, craggy heights are splashed in May with a mass of yellow gorse that shambles up the steep sides, mingling its gold with wild flowers many hued,—those dainty spring flowers that grow in profusion everywhere,—a flowered pattern against the soft, grassy background that carpets the cliff's rude tableland, where Henry of Navarre trained his cannon to do their deadly work of assault and battery, the power of those iron balls cutting deep upon the stonework of the fifteenth century Talbot Tower adjoining the main donjon. Thus Henry, making a breach, passed through with his troopers, with scarce any opposition, wrenching the castle from the terrified defenders, who struck but a feeble blow in her defence. The townsfolk he found of sterner metal, the women aiding in the defence, stemming the tide, at least temporarily, by deeds that won the admiration of their foes.

It was, however, in the early days of cannon-balls, in the fifteenth century, after the capture of Falaise by the English Henry V., that the beautiful Talbot Tower was built, erected by Henry's governor, John Talbot, as a direct consequence of the introduction of this more modern warfare. Cylindrical in form, it rises in its delicate strength and with easy grace, one hundred and eleven feet, a masterpiece of perfect workmanship. Its stones, smooth set and wonderfully laid, are in strange contrast to the rough surfaces of the tenth century donjon. This tower was the last retreat in time of siege, and could be cut off entirely from the rest of the castle. And, with its deep well of water, provisions and a full store of ammunition, it was calculated to sustain a long, hard siege with comparative ease. There is a space in the middle of the flooring in each of the four stories, where, in the old days, they might, by aid of some crude device, transport the ammunition from the rock-hewn dungeons where it was stored, to the various floors. The staircases, as in the donjon keep, are all intermural—telling proof of the great thickness of the walls. Talbot restored the entire château during his reign as governor, beautifying and adorning his special apartments with frescoes and rich hangings. These, together with the giant

26 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

fireplace, piled high with blazing logs, must have taken much of the chill from the rude stone walls of early feudal days.

But after all, these are but aftermaths in Falaise's history, for her history and her heart centre in reality about her "boy Duke,"—the boy hero whose viselike grip and iron heel were felt later by England, and by France likewise. Here at Falaise we forget his sombre grimness, and recall the gallant young figure of the boy permeated by the sunshine of the Val d'Ante,—an heroic figure, brave and generous; above all, loyal and mindful of his mother in his first hour of triumph. To blot out the stigma of his birth swelled his ambition, doubtless, to accomplishment,—the hewing out of a conqueror's path; but it was greatness of soul, prompted by a deep, true love, that made him set right as best he could his much-wronged mother, giving her, by her marriage with Herlwin de Conteville, a position of honour among his peers. As a boy, then, he was first crowned with laurels, his first essay at arms being the rescue of his beloved castle from his treacherous governor, Toussain, who villainously betrayed his trust for gain, handing over the castle to the still more treacherous French King Henry without striking a blow in her defence.

Thus William the Conqueror lingers in the minds of the Falaisians still,—the “boy Duke,” the boy hero,—this golden memory of him outshining his later deeds and triumphs; the sapling rooted in their hearts, rather than the tall, commanding oak that of a truth shadowed England



St. Gervais, Falaise.

as well as Normandy. And, to-day, as we wander amid the quaintness of the crooked, winding streets, or loiter in the market-place near the beautiful Norman St. Gervais, set in its hoary silveriness against a saffron western sky, and watch the peasants gathering their wares and chattels,—market day being over,—and dispursing thus to

28 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

their homes in some neighbouring hamlet, we may catch far into the blue twilight the echo of a song as it floats up the Val d'Ante upon the quiet evening air, redolent of spring:

“De Guillaume le Conquerant chantons l'historiette
Il naquit, cet illustre enfant,
D'une simple amourette.
Le hazard fait souvent les grands.
Vive le fils d'Arlette!
Normands!
Vive le fils d'Arlette!”



Château Gaillard

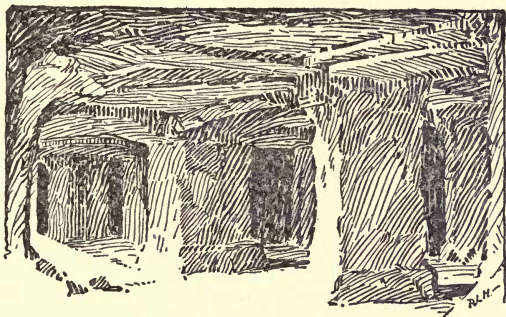
II. GAILLARD

THE air was redolent of spring. A sentient mellowness hung in the golden sunshine of the June afternoon, the spare, grim walls of Château Gaillard rising in broken line from out the dazzling whiteness of the chalk cliffs, cliffs capped by the soft, velvet green of sheep-cropped grass. The silence of the past brooded upon the crumbling walls, save when a hawk swooped low with whirring wings, or a bat flew blindly with a weird wild cry from out the darkness of an old secret passage in a deserted tower. Far below the Seine bent upon itself, exposing thus two sides of access and approach to those who manned the cliff-set castle, Richard's beloved "daughter of a year." While resting in the causeway of the tide, the wooded Isle St. Jacques all shimmering lay, memory lingering round the board once laden with country cheese, fresh eggs and foaming milk, partaken by the castle folk with all due relish and enjoyment; secured from interruption and surprise they were by fortified means, and a subterranean passage connecting farm and castle.

30 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

Down by the river bank tradition hints also of a great flanking tower, captured quite early by the French in the famous siege, and used by them, the pivot of their operations, ending at last in the surrender of that gallant band of those besieged,—forced upon them some would intimate by disaffection,—the disloyalty of one: a postern left, by chance, unguarded; the hole through which the enemy might drive an entering wedge. So did King Philip Augustus capture Richard's darling built to defy him and his heirs, Richard striving thus to guard the borderland between France and Normandy commanding also the great highway to the sea. Richard was as defiant and daring as the wild, brave Rollo, his ancestor, building and destroying with the same generous hand; raising to-day a stronghold of defence, to-morrow pledging an abbey if he make "Bon Port"; a builder and a warrior in one, like the Conqueror, though less stable than that William who fought and built and ruled so strongly. The walls of this fair "daughter" are impregnated with the sunshine of Richard Cœur de Lion's nature, his gay laughter lingering still in cracks and crannies, echoing hollow in those rugged casemates hewn out of the chalk, facing the inner moat about the keep and giving access to the outer castle by a

network of subterranean passageways. The jest and song and clink of wine cup mingle with the hoarse note of sterner life, of war and its fierce battle cries, and groans of men sore wounded unto death; of clamorous victors grasping at her throat, heard in the shrieking wind of ice-bound storms,



The Casemates, Château Gaillard.

rousing the spirits thus to man the walls anew, and to hurl death upon ethereal foes.

While in the soft twilight, in the afterglow of a setting northern sun, a figure veiled and lightly draped wanders with stately tread along the dusk-grown, stone-set passages hung heavily with the mystic past; the arras thrown aside revealing a foul deed, the stench of human blood rising from

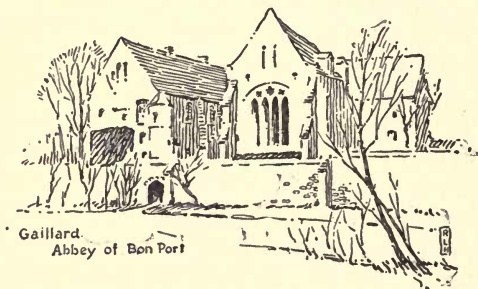
32 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

those great bloodstains drunk eagerly by the cold, heartless stones of porous floor. A woman's voice is heard beseeching; a harsh answer; a blow; a piteous cry; then dark silence unbroken by the ages, dust-covered and buried in the mouldering walls; yet writ past all erasing on the heart of that foul murderer, his name forgotten, known simply by the blot upon his escutcheon. In a towered corner of the thick-set wall, under the shadow of the keep itself, the frail young queen of Louis X., "Le Hutin," Margaret of Burgundy, was held in bondage, strangled at last with the long coils of her hair; her crime, Louis' defection, his fickle heart seeking its setting in a new flame of queenly radiance. Louis has sunk into obscurity, forgotten beneath long centuries of dust; but the voice of her he killed goes crying down the night, shrilling the walls with ghostly echoes of her mad terror and reproachful callings—a wandering soul disquieted. David Bruce spent his period of exile here, sitting at evening, perchance, upon the walls with his young bride Jane, and gazing off over the rolling reach of fertile country intersticed by the silver Seine glinting now here, now there, as it winds in snake-like loops among the green and brown and golden yellow of the grain.

Across the sweep of river flowing so steadily at the foot of the château, clings the tattered shreds of an old mill, the secret way of escape known only to Richard and his Moorish physician; entered by panelled means from some brooding tower, and leading thence beneath the river to this seclusion, where a boat provisioned and full-oared lay ever ready to ply swiftly hence to safety. One can in fancy picture the armoured hosts of Philip Augustus' army crowding down by the river bank, or lining the hill across the deep ravine, the rocky bed in those days for the swift rushing of a mountain torrent, the Gambon so it was called. The Little Andelys crouches at the castle's feet, with quaint, shambling houses and a fine church noted for its architectural purity, its thin-lanterned spire a strange contrast to the blunted castle towers clinging to the sheer whiteness of the cliff. Wherever one goes one sees these two powers, military and religious, rising side by side, and we question which was the outcome of the other: one maintaining itself by pure brute strength, wholly external; the other by an inward spiritual grace, the internal dominating by the very force of its spirituality, proving itself the stronger in that it has outlasted by centuries turreted walls and entrance ways. The

34 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

feudal lords protected themselves thus from their fierce foes, defying kings and commoners alike, shutting themselves within their strongholds,—mere nests of robbers often,—and in expiation of their sins building a church or abbey as a votive offering, a sop, perhaps, to an overladen conscience. Thus Richard, the impetuous, the gen-



erous, the brave, has left behind him at least one abbey built at his instigation, the beautiful old abbey of Bon Port, a mark of his impulsiveness. One day when out hunting near Gaillard, he somehow got separated from the others, the great stag which he was recklessly pursuing, crashing through the forest only to plunge at length into the Seine. The water boiled and seethed, for the season of the Mascaret was at hand, and the onrush of the waters was more than a match for

Richard's own turbulence of spirit. Yet even Richard's valiant courage quailed before this dominant power as he felt his horse, despite heroic efforts, being swept up-stream. Then it was that Richard, perforce acknowledging a power greater than he, vowed that if he reached the shore, making thus "bon port," he would erect an abbey there upon the river bank, a thank-offering for his deliverance,—a vow he did not fail to fulfil. To-day one may see still, though the abbey church itself is but outlined by the long line of pillar bases, the refectory, exquisite in its simplicity of design, the east window but four pointed lancets surmounted by three small roses. The monastic buildings are also preserved, the habitation now of a Parisian family.

But this is but a happening in Richard's life, not the main stem of his building activity; nor is it in ecclesiastical architecture that his great engineering genius has left its stamp. Cognisant as he was in the art of war, with a horizon of experience touching the Orient as well as France, his analytic mind grasped problems of defence hitherto unsolved; resolving themselves at last in his "fair daughter of a year." At Gaillard we see the first château built with an eye to strategic possibilities; so it displays an intellectuality not

36 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

found in the round towers and thick-set walls of earlier castles. Each part was built with a special end in view, with other means than mere strength determined by the thickness of a wall, though that was not forgotten either. The main work sits firmly upon the edge of the precipitous cliff, and is composed of three parts: a donjon; a citadel surrounded by a deep, dry fosse; while beyond that spreads an outer court enclosed by towered ramparts, and cut off from the outworks by a second dry fosse, deep-hewn from the cliffs of chalk, sheer and uncompromising, in defiant mood. Its one weak point is the narrow stair leading from the citadel into the donjon keep itself; for thus an enemy, having taken the outer court, might from the walls pick off the retreating men one by one, as for a second they must stand exposed and alone in seeking safety in their last retreat. Thus did Philip Augustus, gaining access to the castle by treacherous means, wrest Château Gaillard from the English in 1203: Richard's "darling daughter of a year" brought low by one man's defection.

As the sun sank in the Orient-hued west, tinting Gaillard's silvered walls to flashing gold, her former glory burned itself upon me; her power also, and her massive strength; the grim defiance of her

mood still, even in her withered beauty; her gay, mocking laughter echoing far across the valley. As we wandered down in the blue twilight, my friend and I, two boys caught up the strain, mocking our foreign mode of speech. Descendants, doubtless they were, of those selfsame men who reared this mighty castle of defence, but to be cast out by her in their time of need during the great siege. Seeking "bon port" they were thrown back upon the enemy to pay starvation's wage, caught literally between two fires from which they might neither retreat nor advance. My friend, exasperated at last beyond endurance by the boys' persistent mocking, snatched my tripod, and pulling out one of the legs, flew at them crying in a voice worthy of Richard himself, "Dépechons garçons!" The boys, terror-stricken at the sudden onslaught, turned and fled, hurling back at us as they ran: "Assassins! Criminelles!" until the scarred walls of the château awoke with echoes, the slumbering past, so rudely awakened, deeming us enemies where we would have claimed kinship.

Château Gaillard sits grim, defiant still, looking down from her vantage point with a half mocking smile; yet in the gathering night clinging in softer mood to the great cliff that guards her entrance ways: the expression truly of the

38 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

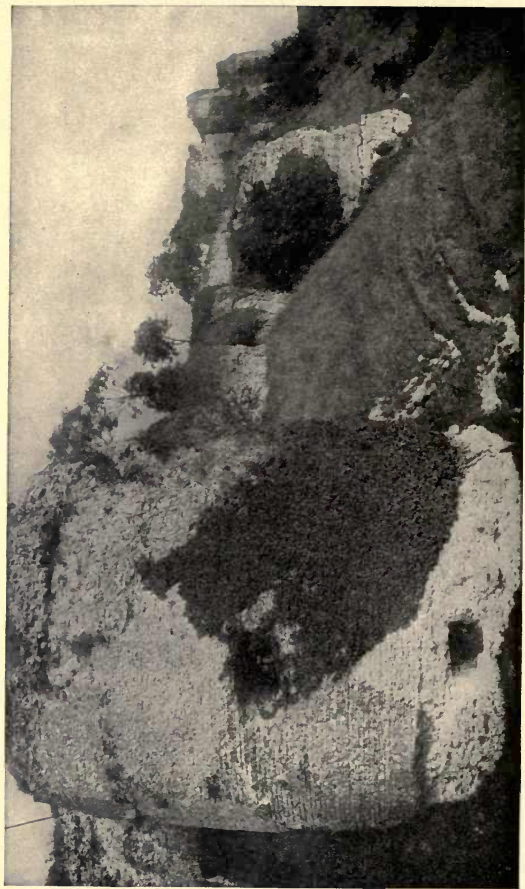
great genius who gave her birth, the imprint of his character stamped upon her time-worn walls and toppling towers; the key, of a truth, that sets the temper of Richard Cœur de Lion's heart.

III. ARQUES-LA-BATAILLE AND GISORS

ON every height, Goethe says, there lies repose. On the heights of Arques-la-Bataille there lies the repose of bygone strength, the silvered calm of crumbling walls, indicative of power departed, of an age that conceived the rude cradle of modern nationalism. Like all Norman châteaux, Arques commands a strategic position. Its bulky, thick-set towers and mighty donjon keep are poised like a great bird of prey upon the emerald cliff that rises precipitously amid the broad green valley of the Arques, a valley shot with the silver threads of quiet streams, that meeting like twin souls, together seek the vast infinitude of sea some three miles distant. Bordered, too, it is on the northeast by a deep forest that stretching out endlessly, melts into the dimness of a cloud-flecked horizon; the grey eagle perched in the solitude of craggy heights, girt about by drowsy streams, yet within sound of the restless, pulsing sea pounding ceaselessly, relentlessly, upon the æon-worn cliffs of Dieppe. Over this vast expanse of fertile pasture land,

40 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

above the grey town crouching at its feet, the eagle hovers, poised in flight upon the green-carpeted chalk promontory, alert, confident, defiant, flinging the gauntlet to the bold stranger who dares molest his lair. Fight it will to the last gasp in defence of its beloved Normandy, at whose gates it stands a sentinel on guard, protecting its loved mistress with the rude tenderness and chivalry of a mediæval knight; all petty family quarrels and jealousies between neighboring domains forgotten when she is threatened with danger. Thus at Arques we see the difference in construction as well as in conception between the Norman and the French château. The Norman château was built primarily to defend a territory, not, as in the French château, a feudal domain. It commanded passageways, and was built on a far larger scale in order to accommodate greater numbers of men, arms and ammunition; whereas the early French château was smaller, all the intellectual faculties of their builders being turned to personal defence. So feudalism, awakening as it did in Normandy individual responsibility, became indeed the rude cradle of modern nationalism, welding men together by pride, by patriotism, by deathless love; developing in them, too, a bigness of soul that rose above the petty, ignoble



Château of Arques-la-Bataille, Exterior

jealousies of factional quarrels and family feuds. A hard bed, you will say, in which to be nurtured; yet muscle can not be developed on a bed of eider-down, and the child of such upbringing is the hardier for it.

Except on the northeastern side, the cliff drops sheer to the plain, and this side is protected by an outer line of walls that forms a lower court, or "Baille" as it was called. A ragged line of houses straggles up the one winding street of the town to a small square, and from thence a narrow lane leads precipitously up between wisteria-laden walls to the great towered entrance that even now in its shorn beauty commands and defies as a gruff watch-dog bars the entrance to an open gate. Stripped by marauders of their outer dress of stone, the walls and towers reveal their inner selves, the thin courses of Roman brick the sterling soul of them that until recent years lay hidden behind their stone-masked faces. No known record exists as to whether this was the former site of a Roman camp, and yet, it seems to me, these bricks plead eloquently with time's forgetfulness.

The ruins as they exist to-day were begun in the eleventh century by William, Count of Arques, a half uncle of the Conqueror's, an unscrupulous

42 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

man whose first act after obtaining his countship was one of treacherous defiance of his nephew, to whose generosity he owed his title and his château site. Safely ensconced behind his high impregnable walls, he gathered together the disloyal and discontented nobles and prepared to dispute William the Conqueror's right to his dukedom because of illegitimacy. The plot failed miserably, in that William with his usual vigour, promptly lay siege to Arques, blockading it by a deep fosse of countervallation so effectively that after a futile appeal to the French king the besieged were obliged to capitulate; and the "Bastard of Normandy" was superseded forever in their minds by "William the Conqueror," to whom they ever after gave unwavering allegiance.

All the subtle genius of the Norman builder is portrayed at Arques, the recessed approach to the giant donjon keep through two outer courts, each guarded by frowning gateways, the ground sloping gradually upward toward this central pivot of the castle's strength; the oblique position of the donjon, that not only masks the court behind it, but commands the outworks likewise, its eaglelike claws gripping the cliff as it hangs over the yawning fosse, swift to swoop upon its prey; and above all, the cleverness with which the château walls

are reared, not on the edge of the cliff, which its natural defences might well warrant, but set back some fifty feet, giving place for the deep dry fosse that adds thus tenfold to its impregnability. An arched passageway leads beneath the donjon to a heavily-guarded postern that, by means of a draw-bridge, gave access to the hillock beyond, crested by earthen palisades, traces of which remain. Yet, after all, Arques' greatest strength lies in its hidden power; for its vast network of subterranean passageways, by which the besieged might make sudden sorties into the moat, were a powerful means not only of attack, but also of interrupting any undermining schemes of the enemy, a scheme often resorted to effect an entrance.

Arques' history is a bloody one, for it lay within the theatre of the French and Norman struggle for domination, and of France's final wresting of Normandy from England. The debatable ground, it might be called, and, although it figured in Henry of Navarre's victory over the League in 1589, Arques' last stand was in reality made against Philip Augustus. He, masking his greed behind the slim form of Arthur of Brittany, whom a cruel uncle had not only defrauded of a duchy, but had also murdered, marched against these border castles, taking them one by

44 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

one,—Radepont, Gaillard, Arques,—the eagle caught at last in the mesh of its own toils, even as it poised to swoop upon its prey. Richard Cœur de Lion was dead, and the eagle perched upon the heights of Arques, drooped and pined for its lost leader.

Across the hills and valleys lying between, Philip Augustus had led his hosts by a circuitous route to this grey outpost by the sea. Gisors was the starting point, the capital of the Norman Vexin that Richard Cœur de Lion had ceded to him by the treaty of Issoudon, an error Richard strove to rectify by rearing his fair daughter Gaillard on the heights of Les Andelys, a menace that for a time checkmated many an ambitious scheme of the French king. Gisors is a masterpiece of military engineering, its great, gaunt walls rising above the wooded heights overshadowing the quaint old town clinging to the rugged hillside; while at its feet the swift-flowing Epte glides silently toward the sea. It stands amid giant shade trees moody and sullen, silent even to grimness, as if brooding upon the past so full of stirring scenes and history-making deeds and pageantries. Built by Robert de Belleme for William Rufus, it differs from both Falaise and Gaillard, and even Arques in its construction. Here the great

square keep is the central point about which the walls are gathered, not perched, as with the other three, upon the edge of the cliff. Gisors has none of the wild, reckless quality of bold adventure, but rather the conservatism of restraint; a reserve that tends to stolidity rather than viril power; brooding melancholy than ecstatic joy and buoyancy. The ruins of the Romanesque chapel dedicated to St. Thomas of Canterbury are a hallmark of the English occupation, a memory of the murdered bishop lingering among the "thrust hills" of the Vexin. Philip Augustus built the massive round "Tour du Prisonnier," a stately tower some sixty feet in height, and looking sleepily down upon the red-tiled roofs of the little town that as yet is scarce awakened by the whirr of modern progress. Within the tower, in the almost pitch blackness of its foundations, the guide will show you some rude sculpturings, the Way of the Cross, cut by the Chevalier Poulain, his only implement a nail, to wile away the agonised monotony of twenty-two years' sojourn within this veritable pit of black despair; the refined cruelty of Louis XI. voiced of a truth in the short inscription scratched at the end of the "Way of the Cross"; "O Mater Dei, memento mei, Poulain." Who may picture the exquisite agony of the solitary

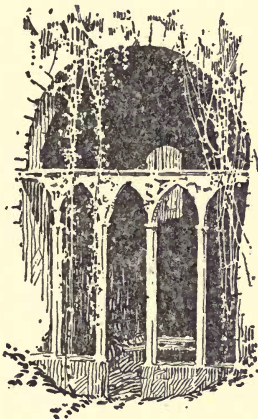
46 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

prisoner, or compass the blackness of his dire hopelessness? A Way of the Cross it was surely, with only the pencilled ray of light from the slit window in his prison wall to foretell the glorious radiance beyond.

Forth from the gates of Gisors, then, Philip Augustus rode one bright autumn day to lay siege to Château Gaillard, that gay, defiant daughter of Richard's, who, ever a menace and a danger, must be brought into subserviency; an easier task now that she rested under the guardianship of her weak, despicable uncle, John Lackland: a task at last accomplished, though at heavy cost. During the siege Philip Augustus struck another blow at Norman power in the capture of Radepont, one of the chain of castles by which Richard hoped to bar the inroads of the ambitious French king. Nothing remains to-day but the picturesque "Tour Jean-sans-Terre," the chapel, an archway and a few crumbling, ivy-grown walls that cling to the side of a heavily wooded gorge, fragrant with the delicate odour of wild flowers, luxuriant in their bloom and coloured carpetings. Away from the great river road, it rests dreamily within sound of the gently murmuring Andelle, the limpid stream that wanders

down the deep, green valley to add its historied record to that of the Seine's own. A brooding tenderness impregnates this hidden vale of peace, where poetry dwells amid the hedgerows and the songs of sweet-throated warblers fill the woods

with melody; a peace that lingers, too, about the old Abbey of Fontaine-Guerard standing at the end of the valley, and within whose walls Marie de Ferrières lies quietly sleeping. Here we feel the poesy, all the dreamy sentiency and love of beauty of France set over and against the



Radepont,
Chapel Ruins.

sterner, cool, analytic practical side; her endless perseverance in accomplishment, too, that has made her great: and it is this two-sided character of hers that has preserved the balance wheel of her vitality and her power. Radepont and Gaillard having fallen, Philip Augustus came finally to Arques, that faithful guardian of a dukedom, the grey eagle made cap-

48 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

tive at last by a power overwhelming in its strength.

Thus we see in each of these old châteaux a marked personality, an individuality and uniqueness that permeates each one with an interest all its own: they are vitally alive. Yet we hear the sceptic marvel at one's ability to see anything in "cold grey heaps of stone." If as Calligé has poetically phrased it, "memory is the twilight of the soul," so I think, in these grey piles of stone, resting in the dim coolness of their evening hour, we shall find the spirit of their age lingering even as the memory, embedded of a truth in the nationalism of our own modernity. And while people flit to and fro on the surface of events and centuries, at times ruffling placidity even to a tidal wave, yet is it not, after all, their works that do follow them? It is works impregnated by the spirit that conceived them that become the mouth-piece of the ages gone.

IV. MONT-SAINT-MICHEL

THERE is a fourth type of hill-town that one finds in France, the monastic hill-town, a hill-town fortified to defend a shrine. To this type Mont-Saint-Michel belongs. Far-off Le Puy and Rocamadour belong also to this type, yet all three are distinctly individual, the product of their environment, the embodiment of the temper of the race that fashioned them. Both Le Puy and Rocamadour, especially Le Puy, are pervaded with the mysticism, the incense-steeped, feminine beauty of Bysantium; Mont-Saint-Michel is wholly western, dominated by the "masculine, warlike energy" of the Norman who has imprinted upon his architecture the virility, the simple directness of his race, this militant spirit symbolised by the armour-clad figure of Saint Michel crowning the lantern of the great abbey church; symbol, too, of the close union of church and state, of God and man, of the spiritual and the material working together without discord,—the keynote, really, of the eleventh century. In position there is a certain similarity between

50 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

Mont-Saint-Michel and Le Puy. Both stand majestic and triumphant upon a pinnacle of rock; but the shrine of Auvergne crowning Mont d'Anis, overlooks a billowy sea of grey-green fields and pasture land rimmed by the snow-clad peaks of the Cevennes; Mont-Saint-Michel rises out of a northern sea that for centuries has hurled its strength without avail against those walled and crenellated heights. Yet Mont-Saint-Michel assailed by the biting north wind and by a northern sea, is not alien to Le Puy; for many a Norman duke and belted knight were of that host of crusaders who paused to pray at the shrine of Our Lady of Le Puy, and who brought back with them rich gifts from the East, together with Eastern ideas of art and architecture. It was the vigour of the Norman race that transformed the Romanesque into so distinct a type that it gave its name to the architecture of Normandy. Therein also lies the difference in the expression of their worship.

Like Le Puy, Mont-Saint-Michel was the site of a Roman temple dedicated to Jupiter, and was known in those days as Mons Tumba. Here also Druids set up their mystic stones to worship, having found their way along the Roman road that led through the green forest of Scissy to the Mont,



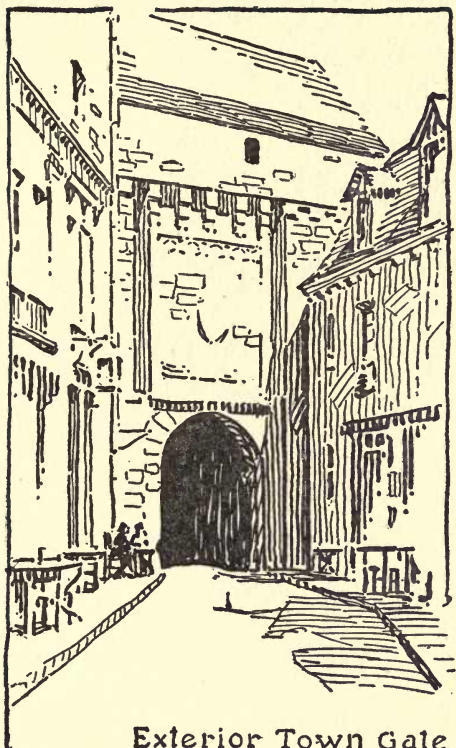
Mont-Saint-Michel, Fishermen in the Foreground

rising in the midst of this great forest of oaks and beeches; for in those days the sea marked the horizon line so distant was it. It was not until the eighth century when Aubert, the good bishop of Avaranches, at the command of Saint Michel was building the first Christian shrine, which he dedicated to the archangel, that a severe earthquake caused a tidal wave that, sweeping in, swallowed up the forest and isolated the Mont and Tombelaine, forming the vast bay of Saint-Michel, and making the Mont the most picturesque and unique spot in the world.

There is something more than mere strength and savagery that grips one at Mont-Saint-Michel. Beauty of form and line are mingled with that strength, a beauty that has been mellowed and enhanced by the centuries that have swept over those scarred and battered walls, over the face of this mountain of the sea crowned by its abbey church. Seen in the soft sunset glow of a May day, one feels its grandeur and aloofness, its beauty and its strength so subtly blended that they are one, the material not only permeated by the spiritual, but lifted up and embodied by that which is divine. The first glimpse of this hill-town of the sea, is a sight never to be forgotten,—the massive bastions and battlemented heights,

52 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

the moss-grown houses of the little town clinging to the sheer sides of the steep, the great abbey church a complicated mass of flying buttresses and retaining walls, of Norman arches and Gothic finials brooding upon the summit and "flinging its passion" against the gold-blue of the sky; while at its feet the wet sands turn to rose. Everywhere there is silence, a breathless waiting for the sea. Then of a sudden one catches the first murmured ripple of the incoming tide, and on the horizon there appears a thin white line of foam. The murmuring voice of the sea grows more insistent, reminiscent of Debussy's sea music in "*Pelléas and Mélisande*," swelling and swelling in its onrush across the seven miles of roseate-hued sands until the floodtide has once more returned to its wooing of the sacred mount. Slowly there comes the long northern twilight, violet coloured, gradually deepening into night until the sky becomes a galaxy of stars; and everywhere there is silence save for the cheep of a bat, the faint sighing of the wind among the trees in the tiny wood that grips the precipitous side of the rock, and the insistent music of the sea. Thus is the warrior-spirit of Mont-Saint-Michel blended with that of the dreamer, the Mont suggestive in its dream-



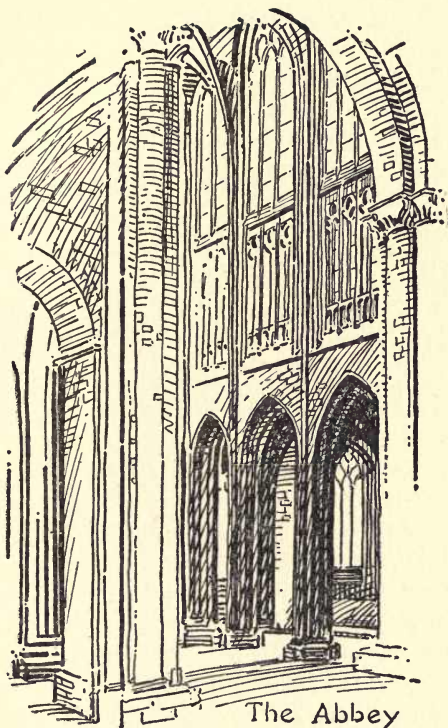
Exterior Town Gate.
Mont Saint-Michel

54 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

like quality of Milton's "great vision of the guarded mount."

One enters the town by the old water gate, a little town of a few clambering houses and one street that winds its tortuous way past the tiny parish church and the house where dwelt the gentle Lady Tiphaine, wife of the rough though splendid Bertrand du Guesclin, to the foot of the steps that lead upward to the entrance gates of the abbey, the entrance being reached also from the ramparts. These grim gates of the donjon, La Chatelet, are flanked with towers, the donjon's grizzled battlements flinging defiance as it frowns down upon an ever-enveloping sea.

Having passed through the donjon gates and the Salles des Gardes, one follows a pilgrims' way,—the abbot's stairs and the Grand Degré,—that leads upward to the abbey church, the shrine that is the very heart of this sacred Mont. The church was begun in 1020 by Abbot Hildebert, a work in which he was encouraged and materially assisted by the Norman Duke, Richard II., grandfather of the "Conqueror." The Normans were builders, and in their work one finds not only daring and energy and warlike characteristics, but thoroughness; and in the splendid eleventh century crypt of the Gros Piliers there

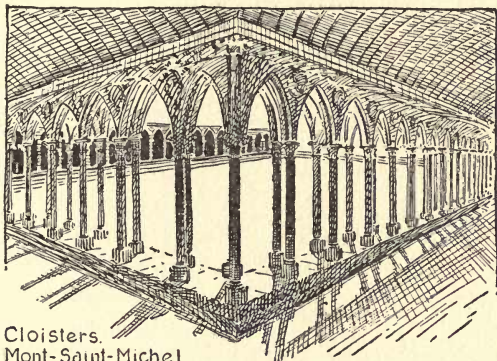


The Abbey
Mont Saint-Michel

56 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

is found the same perfection of workmanship, the same attention to detail that is seen in the work of the great arches of the nave. Four of these arches are still standing, proof truly of the solidity of the Norman work. With characteristic daring, this Norman abbot set his church upon the apex of the rock, building out retaining walls and buttresses to distribute the weight. A successor of the abbot's, Robert de Torigny, in 1170 reconstructed the west front and added two towers; but these fell in 1300, as did the choir in 1421. Thus this choir in its rebuilding, flowered into Gothic, the apsidal east end with its mass of flying buttresses giving the exalted winged victory effect to the great church built upon its rocky eminence. That which the "Romanesque could not express, flowered into the Gothic." Some one has said that "what the masculine mind could not idealise in the warrior, it idealised in the woman"; so at Mont-Saint-Michel we see again its keynote in the harmonious blending of early Norman and late Gothic, the seriousness, restraint and reposeful energy of the Norman and the passionate joy, aspiration and abandon of the Gothic, each with its special message, each imparting of its strength and of its beauty to the other without discord. Yet for all its loveliness

there is a sense of disappointment when one steps into this beautiful but empty church that is now undergoing a thorough restoration after its long use as a prison since the Revolution, when the monks of Saint Maur, who succeeded the earlier Order of the Benedictines in 1615, were expelled.



Cloisters.
Mont-Saint-Michel

With their going the monastic atmosphere has vanished, and with it that sense of worship, that incense-cloud of prayer when the church, as at Le Puy, was always "watching to God." So too in the exquisite granite thirteenth century cloisters, Italian in their delicacy, and unequalled in France save at Saint Wandrille and Le Puy, one is haunted by their tomblike silence. In

58 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

these beautiful old cloisters one feels deeply, however, the refining power of beauty, these cloisters being truly "a reassertion of the mastery of love, of thought and of poetry in religion, over the masculine, military energy" of the great Hall of the Chevaliers below. The columns, which form a double arcade, are richly carved. The beautiful frieze is like finely-wrought lacework, and is in perfect preservation.

In 1203 Philip Augustus wrested Normandy from the English, and in celebration of the event, the Duke of Brittany burned the town, damaging the abbey. To atone for this vandalism the king gave a large sum for its restoration which was carried out by Abbot Jordan who planned the huge pile covering the northern side of the Mount,—Le Merveille,—a marvellous piece of construction and may well be compared with Amboise. Le Merveille consists of three stories. The top floor is on a level with the cloisters; the second, contains the Salle des Chevaliers of the Order of Saint Michel, an order founded here by Louis XI. in 1469, and the refectory, one of the finest Gothic halls in France; on the lowest floor the almonry is the chief point of interest. The great thirteenth century hall of the Chevaliers and the refectory, also of that same period, are halls such

as were found in every château, and are almost the only monuments of secular architecture of the perfect period of Gothic art extant. They may well be called the "antechambers to the nave of Chartres." The Romanesque capitals are richly carved; the early Gothic vaulting is perfectly pro-



Mont-Saint-Michel.
La Salle des Chevaliers.

portioned: and in every stone there lives still the "warlike energy" of Saint Michel. The lighting of the refectory is superb, and is, as some one has aptly phrased it, "a simple preamble to the romance of the Chartres windows."

The Promenoir is a twelfth century transitional work, and belongs to the earlier days of the ab-

60 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

bey's history when it still gave its allegiance to the Norman dukes. Here the Dukes of Normandy were entertained in great splendour, notable among them, Henry II., of England, and his queen Eleanor of Guienne. After the driving out of the English in 1203 Mont-Saint-Michel remained in the hands of the French, and was the only fortress in Normandy that successfully withstood the armies of Henry V. In this portion of the abbey are the dungeon of Cardinal La Balue, who afterwards exchanged this prison for that of Loches, the Crypte de l'Aquilon, and a crypt used by the monks as a cemetery.

In these abbatial buildings the keynote of Saint Michel is again struck. The secular and the ecclesiastical jostle each other without discord; the jongleur and the pilgrim meet and together wend their way upward to the shrine upon the summit. At these great feasts the jongleur, Blondel perchance, sang his songs, and the young monk, William de Saint-Pair recited for the ducal company his "Chanson de Roland." Just above the level of the great hall is the chapter house, a masterpiece of the mason's chisel, an ideal spot for study where doubtless many a "Roman" was written, and where the old monks probably illumined many of the missals and manuscripts for which

this abbey was justly famous. Feasting they knew full well, these warrior monks; but the intellectual feasts in the old chapter house outnumbered those of the great hall; for in the days of Middle Age, Mont-Saint-Michel earned the name of the "City of Books." A few steps brought the monks from the chapter house to the cloisters for meditation; a few more led them to the church for prayer.

Standing upon the great platform of the Saut Gaultier, overlooking the jumble of houses in the little town, the church close by rising exultant into a cloudless sky, the rock bathed in the gold glow of sunset, the past sweeps in with the onrush of the swift-coming tide, a grim warlike past living still in every stone, yet mellowed by the centuries, refined by the exquisite beauty of the Gothic. In imagination one can see pilgrim and jongleur, monk and armoured knight crowding up the steep pilgrims' way to the heights crowned with the abbey church, heart of sea-bound Mont-Saint-Michel, which for some twelve hundred years was always "watching to God." Though the rude energy of the Norman has been refined and lifted up by the spiritual exaltation of the Gothic, yet the virility is undiminished. The militant spirit symbolised by the mail-clad

62 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

figure of Saint Michel is the dominant note, the kingdom of God dwelling within the heart of this tiny tide-beset hill-town, Saint Michel, the warrior and the dreamer listening to the eternal calling of the sea.

III

FOUR HILL-TOWNS OF BRITTANY

I. SAINT-JEAN-DU-DOIGT

THE conflict of all alien forces tends to the making of nations, as it tends also to the making of the individual character. We see the primitive Breton peasant standing shyly on the broader threshold of modernity that offers ever widening possibilities for the future, as the forces of the present, ranging themselves against the great wall of the past, buttressed with tradition, pierce it despite its thickness. By dwelling mostly upon their primitive side, we may, perhaps, see the trend of this future that is dawning for them.

The Celt has always stood aloof, proud, reserved, distinct in race, in feeling, in language, in tradition; above all, tenaciously loyal to all that he holds sacred. Brittany, from the natural isolation of her position, has fostered all these characteristics, and to cross the border line separating Normandy from Brittany is to step into

64 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

another world, a world of rugged scrub growth; of craggy rocks that peep from beneath the gold of gorse and broom, and the deep purple of the bell heather; of sharp, barren hills where one gets glimpses of the wild, northern sea; of deep, soft green valleys where the cuckoo hides, and an undercurrent of joyous forest life throbs busily. The Argoät, that green forest land, folds within its hills the runic murmur of romance, a romance of pastoral simplicity; but it is the Armôr, that coast of Brittany with its naked, storm-carved cliffs, that brings us face to face with the stern realities of the Breton life.

It was midsummer's eve, yet the freshness of April was in the air, and the uncertainty of April weather lurked in the heavy clouds as they swept slowly across the June sky. Down in the valley that enfolds the quaint town of Morlaix, the clouds burst into momentary fits of passion; but drenched streets and dripping house roofs could not dampen the ardour or stay the steps of the pilgrim peasants who, in gala attire, crowded *diligence*, *char-à-bancs*, and high two-wheeled carts, and rumbled off along the pilgrims' way to Saint-Jean-du-Doigt.

As the road bent upward and away from the river, the shower was left behind, and the grey-

massed clouds revealed the blue that edged their silver lining. The road led northward across the hills, sometimes between long avenues of beeches through which the sun filtered its dull yellow gold; again winding down across the gorge of the Dourdû, where, amid its silent, savage grandeur, one caught a glimpse of the sea. In the hawthorn, birds sang; in the fields and along the road flowers bloomed; and the hearts of the passers-by echoed the song and gathered the flowers.

Peasants from many parishes trudged along that road, wending their way toward Saint-Jean to participate in this fête of the solstice,—this Feast of Light that links back to old Celtic days and even to the fire worshippers of the East. Occasionally one passed a cowherd clad in goatskin, a touch as primitive as if a satyr peered from behind an oak. The road led truly into a little world apart, a world of which simplicity was the keynote, the simplicity of those who live close to Nature, who know her moods, who love yet fear her, and who yield themselves to her guidance.

The way went with sudden swiftness to the valley where Saint-Jean, though part of it skirts the hill-crest, lay hidden in an amphitheatre of exquisite green. A half-mile distant shimmered

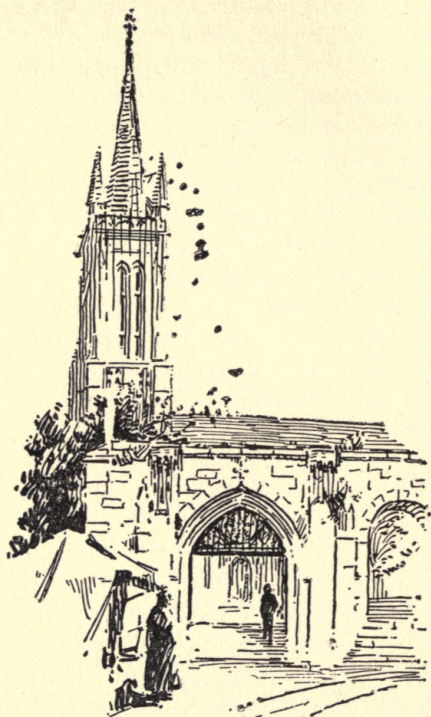
66 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

the sea, shot in mystic green and purple hues, touched here and there with gold as the sun broke through the huddling masses of flying clouds still glowering in the sky. The little valley lies within a horseshoe circle of high hills that pause abruptly, jagged and torn by the rude play of the sea above which they brood so dreamily. The green of its fields is set about with the royal purple of the heather; its solitude echoes the silvery laughter of hidden water brooks, the merry gurgle of many fountains and the far-off croon of ceaseless tides. This open temple is dedicated to the "King of Stars," as the Bretons call the sun, and the Bretons have hallowed it by long centuries of worship, the worship of Heol, the God of Light,—a worship that has changed its form, perhaps, yet harks back unmistakably to the ancient Celtic Nature worship of old Druid days.

The tiny, freshly whitewashed houses that straggle down the hillside into the valley were half-hidden by the booths and caravans of the gipsies, who were there in plenty, displaying their cheap, tawdry wares,—coloured beads, coloured streamers, candy and gaudy calicoes; others were making pancakes or offering to tell your fortune for a sou. The wheezing monotony of a carousel rose above the hum of the crowd, ming-

ling discordantly with their gay laughter. Many of the crowd lingered about the booths, yet some pushed their way eagerly toward the old fountain that stands just within the crumbling gateway of the tumble-down churchyard. The fountain is a beautiful piece of Renaissance work, probably of some forgotten artist, and about it the peasants gather to bathe their eyes in its sacred waters that have been blessed by the holy finger of Saint Jean, the holy relic that found its way to Saint-Jean in miraculous fashion during the fifteenth century, supplanting the devotion hitherto given to Saint Meriédek, the early Cornish saint for whom the village was originally named,—Traoum-Meriédek.

It was interesting to stand in the old gateway and watch the crowd sway restlessly to and fro, as the peasants surged up and down the tiny street, loitered by the gateway, or pressed on to pray in the grey moss-grown church, half-ruinous with the years, its beauty all but despoiled by too rude handling, save for a broken bit of an exterior triforium and the slender, graceful Gothic tower that points upward into the calm blue of the sky. All types were there,—those of fair hair and mystic blue of eye; those dark of hue, with eyes reflectant of the wood-brook's golden brown; those



The Church Gateway,
St. Jean-du-Doigt



The Procession, St. Jean-du-Doigt

of the blue-black hair, whose eyes gather within their depths the dream-fugues of the sea. The weathering of the sea and the struggle for existence have left their mark upon those stern, square-cut faces, faces softened by the fund of humour lurking about the corners of their mouths and lighting their eyes with sudden fire.

Suddenly the bells rang out in silvery music. The carousel ceased its monotonous wheezing, and a hush fell upon the crowded street. Some priests, preceded by the Swiss, a crucifer and attendant acolytes, came out of the church, crossed the churchyard, and went down the street to meet the procession from Plougasnou, the only parish that still joins its banners with Saint-Jean in this yearly festival. In the old days, processions from many parishes came from across the hills and by boat. Now they celebrate their own festivals or come merely as spectators.

Vespers in the church over, the procession reformed. From the top of the hill where the three ways meet, and where from pagan times the Tantad has been burned, one could see the procession coming, winding in and out among the deep-set lanes, the peasants chanting as they came. On they marched, the great banners waving in the breeze, until they reached the top of the hill

70 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

where the huge stack of gorse, crowned with a cross of roses, stood ready for the fiery dragon that would soon be winging its way down the rope that stretched from the church tower to the stack. First came the crucifer and acolytes, followed by the big banners and the little girls from Plougasnou, dressed in white dresses, shawls and lace caps, four of whom carried a canopy of blue over a statue of the Blessed Virgin. Then came the Saint-Jean banners, girls in white, little children carrying little white banners edged with different coloured streamers. Next the priests came, robed in gorgeous yellow vestments and bearing the sacred relics. Behind them walked the boy Saint Jean, clad in a lamb's-wool jacket, a wreath of white flowers resting on his fair curls. In front of the boy walked a lamb, a red cord attached to his horns. The ends of the cord were held by two peasants who walked on either side of the little Saint Jean.

The singing ceased as the procession gathered about the Tantad, and a wave of silence swept the multitude hovering all about. Far off lay the sea, wind-tossed, colour-flecked, soundless. The voice of the wind alone was heard as it came chanting its pagan chant to heroic measure,—the echo, perchance, of the druid worshippers of long

ago. Intensity marked each face in that huddled crowd. A rocket shot straight and high toward the dark mass of clouds, and a shout followed its flight; the beginning of the end was at hand. One girl stood shyly beside her sweetheart, a bunch of "fire flowers" in her hand, ready to cast them into the flames. It was midsummer's eve, and she had made a wish that was near to her heart. The wishes of a year hung in the balance as the peasants waited for the flight of the fire-dragon. The signal was given at last as the great banner of Saint-Jean was raised and inclined three times, and all eyes turned toward the church tower, where the bells had begun to ring again. Down the rope the fiery little dragon flew, hurling itself with incredible swiftness into the stack. A curl of smoke, a crackling sound, a flame all copper-hued shot up against the grey-blue sky, spreading swiftly, and,—the wishes for that year were safe, their fulfilment assured.

"*An Tan! An Tan!*" the Gaelic cry for fire rang out finding echo in the hills.

"*An Tan! An Tan!*" the church bells pealed, deep down in the valley.

"*An Tan! An Tan!*" the wind sang as it sped up the valley and across the vast, unknown spaces of the sky.

72 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

The procession had reformed, and the joyous, laughing, happy voices of the peasants trooping down the hillside floated upward to the holy ground, the pagan Trivia, where three roads meet. Away to the west, Heol, the Sun God trailed his robes of purple-gold across the barren hills. In that gold glow of sunset I saw reflected the barbaric splendour of old Druid worship, of the East. In the flare of the Tantad I saw it softened and transformed, yet these people glorifying still the great spirit of Life and Light. I realised also that the primitiveness of these people was passing, as was their clinging to these simple, primitive beliefs. The great world outside has touched them and has left them a trifle self-conscious, a trifle less credulous of superstitious sayings, though their faith is still unbroken, undisturbed. The day of the Pardon is undoubtedly numbered; its need is outgrown. The majority of the people stand on the edge of the crowd, spectators rather than participants. Nature worshippers they are still. Yet a future with broader, richer possibilities is opening for them,—a road that is leading them out from the Trivia with the glow of the Tantad still shining in their eyes.

II. LA FAOUËT

Argoät, Armór—close sheltering crests of pine
And vales of ancient silence walled by these.

MRS. OWENS.

HEDGED in by the “ancient silence” of the Black Hills, the little town of La Faouët listens dreamily to the sylvan laughter of a water brook as it winds down the soft, green valley of the Ellé—that same silvery laughter that at Saint-Jean was mingled with the ruder laughter of the sea. And therein lies the difference between the Argoät and the Armór of Brittany. The Armór is rugged and barren; its hills and jagged cliffs flash the rough sparkling beauty of an uncut gem. The Argoät is set in mystic beauty—beech forests and fields of rustling grain; its steep hills and deep, winding valleys echo the runic murmur of romance. The busy, joyous hum of forest life surrounds one; the swish of a flail, the minor melody of a quaint Breton chanson floating across the fields of mellowing grain, or the far-away sound of a shepherd’s pipe interpret the simple, pastoral

74 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

life of these people, in whose present still lingers fifteenth-century remoteness. Yet even here, amidst a seemingly untouched primitiveness of life and living, modernity has at least to some extent broken through the "walled silence" of their reserve. Unconsciously they are looking beyond



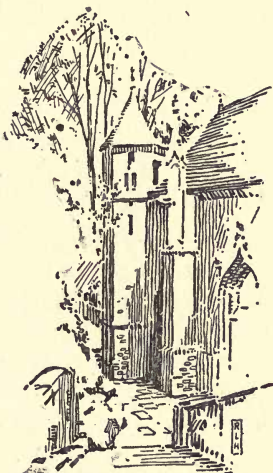
Road leading into La Faouët

the line of their beech-crested hills, beyond the verge of the forest of Broceliande into a modern world.

There is but one road leading into this untouched Breton town of La Faouët—the road to yesterday—a wild, rambling road that winds across the hills and through lovely, verdant valleys where tumultuous little streams laugh mer-

rily—the sylvan, elfish laughter of Broceliande. The July air was keen, the atmosphere clear-cut like September, the clouds making shadow-pictures across the gorse and heather-decked hills.

The same wonderful buoyancy, the pent-up vigour that is felt en route to Saint-Jean was in the air, and along the white road picturesque peasants in Sunday attire trooped gaily homeward, singing, laughing, merry. It was the fête of Sainte Barbe, the great festa day of the year at La Faouët. Summoned by the tolling of the great bell, the peasants had



Tower of St. Barbe
La Faouët

gathered on the pine-clad hill beside the curious square bell-tower, there to worship in the old, moss-grown chapel of Sainte Barbe, that is set in the cliff some three hundred feet above the rushing, tumbling Ellé. The chapel is the votive offering of one Jean de Toulbodou to Sainte Barbe,

76 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

who miraculously preserved him from harm during a terrific thunderstorm which overtook the knight while hunting in the valley in 1849. Beautifully balustraded steps, hollowed by centuries of pilgrim feet, lead down from the belfry to the chapel, where an old Breton with long, grey hair and clad in a homespun linen suit, unlocked the door to the past—a past that not only was but is. Here the “ancient silence” knows no penetration. About the age-worn chapel lies the forest, shimmering in the July sunshine, quivering with its invisible forest life; echoing the song of birds, exuding the pungent fragrance of deep woods. At the top of the balustraded steps, across a miniature bridge, the wee chapel of Saint David is perched upon a jut of rock. Within, the old man pointed to a statue of Saint Guenolé, the patron saint of cattle. Votive offerings of cows’ tails were heaped beneath the statue of the saint, offered, the guardian explained, through the aid of the bright-eyed Marianne, who acted as interpreter, in order “that the cows might become gentle cows with good dispositions.” The simple faith of the old man and the little girl was very realistic, very touching. The two were one in their faith. But the old man, slow of thought, slower

of speech, was lost forever behind that "ancient silence."

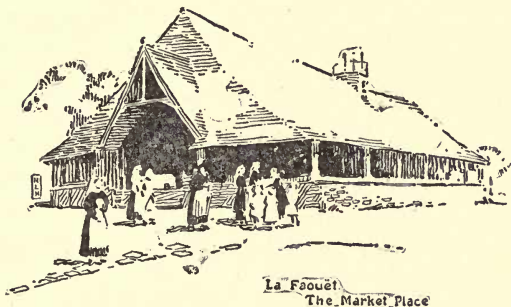
The holy well of Sainte Barbe, with its moss-dimmed bas-relief of the good saint, lies in a green meadow at the foot of the cliff to which the chapel clings. It dates back to the founding of the chapel and on the fête day the girls gather there to find an answer to that all-important question—"Will they marry within the year?" At the bottom of the stone basin is a hole about the size of a fifty-cent piece, and on the dropping of a pin through this aperture hang their fondest hopes. It was the nature worship of Saint-Jean transferred from the fire to the water. And the cry I had heard at Saint-Jean echoed in my mind: "You have been to the Fire. Come to the Water also!"

As at Saint-Jean, life among these people seemed simple enough to present no problems. Yet as I sat there by the old fountain with Mari-anne listening to her prattle, I realised that even in fifteenth-century La Faouët, the problem of transition was upon them. It was a sensitive little face that looked up into mine, a child's face made serious by care. Fair hair peeped shyly from beneath the pretty lace cap, and the wonderful blue eyes, penetrative yet melting into dreams, gave

78 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

promise of the spirit that would some day pierce the "ancient silence." She told me that she had one sister and three brothers, and that through the curé she had procured a position for the oldest brother as kitchen-boy on a P. & O. boat. Then she added quite simply that in order to place him under the protection of Sainte Barbe, who protects against accident, she had saved up four francs to have a mass said especially for him—"et maintenant il avait chance." Again in speaking of some one who was an orphan she said: "He is indeed poor, he has no father nor mother." Then she spoke of how the government had forced them to speak French in the schools, and of how they had closed the nunnery across the Place—and her face grew like flint. Loyalty, the old feudal loyalty instinctive with these people, rose up in defence of past traditions and that for centuries has been held sacred and inviolate. Yet these children were speaking French—there had been no uprising as in the days of the Chouans. A fatalism founded on infinite hope characterises their attitude, a resignation that accepts present conditions in the hope that things will return to what they have been. But the march of a race is onward, and so by devious ways the Bretons are reaching out towards modernity.

Like all Breton towns, La Faouët straggles about the market place, which is the centre of its life—its everyday life as well as the secular part of its fête days. Here the weekly market takes place; here the gossips of the town gather; here does the carousel drone, and the circus hold sway; here do the pipers sit on the edge of the low



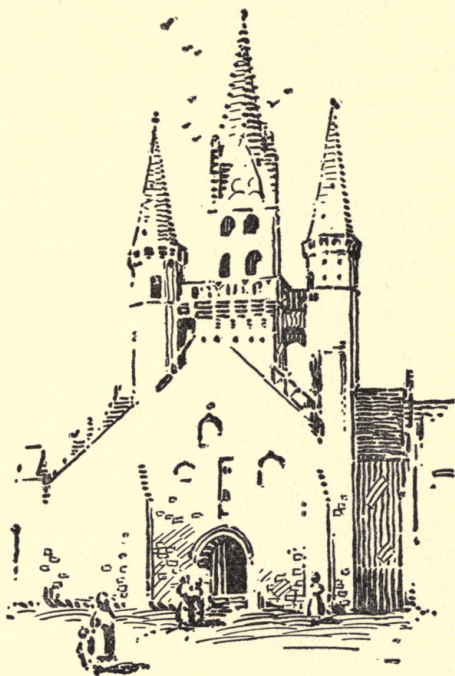
wall that encloses the arched avenue of trees, the pink streamers on their hats waving gaily in the wind, and pipe quaint scraps of tunes while the peasants dance. With flageolet and bagpipe the pipers pipe vigorously as the couples gather under the trees, merry in their holiday. The step was something like a mazurka, and in form something like a gavotte—a running dance with four peasants in a set. It was quaint, primitive indeed,

80 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

and done with the same unconsciousness that is characteristic of all they do: it was the child at play. Between the dances the couples walked around the *Placé* arm in arm—and thus is their simple wooing accomplished.

Then there were races, two peasants of La Faouët upholding the honour of the town against a swaggering “beau gàs” from some neighbouring village. While they were preparing to start, the challenger, with a brave show of superiority, dismounted, tossed the bridle-rein to a man nearby, and followed by his admirers entered the inn. The clink of glasses told of healths being drunk to this country hero. The Faouët men, meanwhile, waited, surrounded by a loyal, eager group who were not niggardly in giving advice and in bidding them be on the lookout for tricks. At last the “beau gàs” swaggered out, and in a moment the three were off down the road, soon disappearing over the crest of a low hill. Ten minutes of breathless suspense, then the clatter of hoofs, and the riders straggled in, the “beau gàs” leading amidst a mingling of shouts and groans as the townspeople saw their champions defeated.

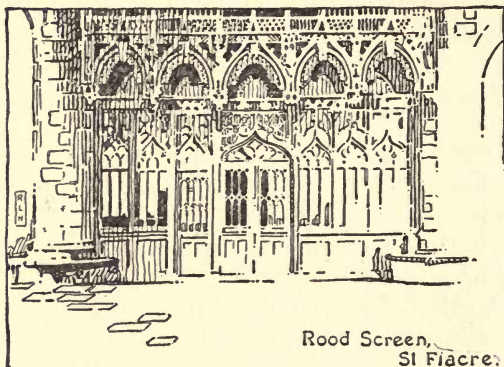
The sun was “raining gold” through the thick vault of trees of a deep, green lane that wound down the hill and along the valley of the *Ellé*



St. Fiacre, La Fauvett.

82 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

toward Saint Fiacre, one of those old, old chapels whose history lies buried among its crumbling walls. A magic stillness hung about the place, the magic of Viviane's forest that breathes of her eternal freshness and beauty. The bell-tower is unique, one thickness of the stone rising up as a



Rood Screen,
St Fiacre

continuation of the west front wall, the bells hanging between its pinnacles—an Eastern touch that would suggest the wind-bells of an Indian temple. Despite its ruinous condition, the chapel is still beautiful, enshrining within its heart a superb fifteenth-century carved wood rood. In style it is flamboyant, lavishly set with figures, mostly relating to the history of Saint Fiacre.

Doubtless this rood, so uncharacteristic of French churches, harks back to English influence due to English occupation during the Hundred Years' War.

Near the chapel is a farmhouse, and there we lingered chatting with the peasants and watching them prepare a stone oven for a neighbourhood's baking—some fifteen enormous loaves in all—which were marked with a horseshoe, a cross or a trefoil for good luck. The older women wore black velvet tub hats, with shoulder capes attached, not unlike those worn by the Welsh women. On the way back, we passed an old woman tending her cow and spinning with a spindle. She stood working busily, the sunset glow brightening her strong, weather-beaten face, a quiet dignity gracing her worn clothes and betokening an innate fineness, revealing the fine tempering of her Breton spirit—a noble simplicity of soul. Well could I imagine her following the old Breton custom of "telling her beads by the stars," as she wandered homeward beneath the deep, dark blue of the night sky.

Simplicity is peculiarly native to these Celtic people, a simplicity that is subtly blended with great strength, gentle courtesy, intense spirituality. Their tenacious loyalty to the past, wrought

84 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

with its traditions and feudalistic ideals, steeped the atmosphere in that of royal France, the fleur-de-lis not dead though trampled underfoot, its bruised sweetness still lingering among the hills of France. Yet beyond these hills of "ancient silence" and the forest of Broceliande lies modernity, and thither is the future beckoning them, even as France, unknowingly perhaps, is looking unto the hills.

III. DINAN AND JOSSELIN

DINAN and Josselin though of different types of hill-town,—the fortified citadel type and the seigneurial,—are yet inevitably linked and bound together by their history; and both are still undisturbed by the whirr of modern industrialism, unspoiled by that present-day vandal the tourist.

Dinan is a *mélange* of all that is old and picturesque, and its greatest charm is its unexpected quaint corners. The hill on which it stands rises abruptly from the wooded valley of the Rance, its ancient walls and towers skirting the crest of the hill silhouetted against the azure June sky, their hoary greyness set in the deep green of the verdure-clad hillside. Its streets, sinuous and often steep, are full of mediæval corners, the houses displaying a great variety of architecture,—some with sculptured pillars, some half-timbered with sharp pointed roofs reminiscent of Switzerland, the finely carved eaves overshadowing the narrow street. A sudden turn will lead into an arcade supported by pillars grotesquely

86 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

carved; then again one passes an old house with a Gothic porch fantastically carved, or with a balcony of exquisite wrought iron work. At the end of one street one comes upon a superb Renaissance gateway surmounted by a balustrade, a scroll work of dolphins that terminate in arabesques. This gateway opens into an old court flanked on three sides by buildings now worm-eaten and falling to decay, but that in mediæval days were the abiding place of the Duke de Beaumanoir and his gaily-clad retinue, that same Beaumanoir who for a space dwelt within the granite walls of Château Josselin. In the rue de l'Horloge stands the fifteenth century belfrey, defaced and ruinous, the great square tower cut in bizarre fashion in the middle by a Gothic campanile with a gallery. From the centre of this gallery is suspended the municipal clock given to the good people of Dinan by the Duchess Anne in 1507. The curious old rue de Jerzual is so steep that the houses descend cascade-like to the Ravin de Jerzual, the lower end of the street guarded by the moss-grown Porte de Jerzual, dating from the thirteenth century. The exterior of the gate is Gothic, severe, machicolated and pierced by a Gothic arch; its interior is Romanesque as revealed by the rounded entrance arch

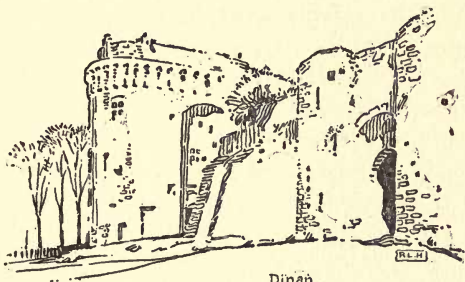
and by the two open arches above, a gateway unique and in keeping with the rest of this ancient street where even the tanneries just beyond the gate, their façades yellow and brown toned to black, add to the mediæval quaintness and soft beauty of the old town steeped in the atmosphere of its great past.

St. Sauveur is nobly set upon its pedestal of rock, its exterior and its interior a curious jumble of four periods of architecture,—Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Eighteenth Century,—producing an effect in part beautiful, in part bizarre. The west front belongs to two periods: the lower portion is Romanesque, the upper with its high gable fifteenth century Gothic. The choir and apse are really fine, but the central tower is heavy and unlovely, a product of the pseudo-classic Eighteenth Century. The chief interest in this old church centres about a stone marking the spot where the great heart of Bertrand de Guesclin lies buried close to the tomb of his wife the gentle Tiphaine de Raguenel, la Fee, whose love he won on the occasion of his crossing swords with an English knight, one Thomas de Cantorbéry, according to the Breton chronicles, a captain in the English host which in conjunction with Jean de Montfort's army was at this time under the lead-

ership of the Duke of Lancaster, laying siege to Dinan. In this year 1359, De Montfort was warring with Charles of Blois for the dukedom of Brittany, and Du Guesclin assisted by the Sire de Penhoët le Boiteux, a scion of the Penhoëts of Josselin, was defending Dinan against these stalwart foes. On the defection of his brother to the English camp, De Guesclin, in an outburst of wrath against such treachery, sent a challenge to Cantorbéry, offering to meet him in the Place du Marché in single combat, and promising safe conduct to the English knights who might accompany him, provided they in return pledged their good faith. The challenge was accepted, the combat taking place amid a gaily-bedizened throng of belted knights and noble ladies. The English knight proved no match for the prowess of Du Guesclin, and Cantorbéry, wounded and chagrined, returned to the English camp swearing vengeance for his humiliation. After many weeks, the English were forced to raise the siege of this stalwart old town that later was to receive Du Guesclin as Connétable de France when he returned to take possession of in it the name of the king, Charles V.

In the far-off days of Middle Age, Dinan was surrounded by a "chaplet of fifty-four towers,"

the enceinte being completed in the fourteenth century by the building of the château which was incorporated in the town walls. Of the four town gates, three remain in fair preservation, the Porte de Jerzual, the Porte Saint Louis near the château and remodelled in the eighteenth century, and the Porte Saint Malo. The beautiful allées



Dinan
Château de la Duchesse Anne

arched with trees, and once the great and the little fossés, lead respectively to the Porte de Brest and the ruinous walls of the château, and to the donjon of the château, this superb oval tower of Queen Anne rising isolated and majestic, its only communication with the Tour de Coëtquen and the rest of the château, a slender aerial arched bridge, picturesque and unique. The donjon is reinforced by a buttress of masonry and is pierced

90 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

here and there by heavily grilled windows, its summit crowned by machicolations. This splendid old fortress was for many years one of the chief strongholds of the Duke de Mercœur, and a bulwark of the leaguers; but Henry IV.'s defection to Catholicism dealt a death blow to the League, and the town soon after opened its gates to the king, thus ending the château's rôle as a great fortress. The northern side of the ramparts are in ruins, the dismantled walls and crumbling towers ivy-grown and lichen-covered; playthings of wind and weather these century-scarred battlements, their grey grimness warmed by the masses of wild pinks blooming in riotous profusion in every crack and cranny of the stout masonry. Such too, is the ancient gate of Saint Malo, its bridge moss-grown, its moat a tangle of weeds and debris. From these crumbling ramparts one can look down upon the jumble of roofs of the town basking in the June sunshine, the Tour de l'Horloge on one side, and St. Sauveur on the other. Within the shadow of the château walls, just below St. Sauveur there is a broad shaded walk, once part of the fortifications, that overhangs the beautiful wooded valley where flows the Rance, the grey line of the ramparts fringed

by the oak-clad hill reflected in its deep green waters.

The environments of Dinan are full of interest with everywhere lovely wood paths that one may follow at will. There is the château of Lehon grouped in the coolness of its nest of leaves about the ruins of the monastery of the monks of Marmoutiers. In the thirteenth century priory church, its arches open to the sky, is found the mortuary chapel of the House of Beaumanoir, the church the centre of the old conventual buildings that sleep beside the Rance. The walk to Claude Touissaint's château of La Garaye, a mere remnant of broken wall and one crumbling tower, is reached by shaded walks and by-paths, the final approach down a long avenue of sunflecked beeches ending at the entrance gate of the château. Everywhere the bright June sunshine filters through the murmuring green leaves, leaves set aquiver by the summer breeze soft with the tang of the sea; and everywhere the birds singing, singing, the forest vibrant with their song. On the return that June evening, we met, my friend and I, a wedding procession led by a Breton "fiddler," the bride wearing a wreath of orange blossoms, and a spray in her black dress. The groom also wore a spray of the flowers in his button hole,

92 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

while to appear at ease he assumed complete indifference to his bride by smoking a long cigar. Behind them came the maid of honour, arm in arm with the best man, the guests following two by two down the village street. This is the charm of Brittany: her past still lives, is part of the people's life, religious or social; it is not dead nor even outgrown.

The road to La Bellière, the old moated château of the Lady Tiphaine, leads through the little hamlet of Vicomté, and on Corpus Christi one may see the peasants preparing for a procession in honour of the Fête Dieu. It was one of those dreamy June days, the air redolent of new-mown hay, that quite by chance we discovered Vicomté in the midst of its festal preparations. On either side of the village street sheets and table clothes festooned with roses and ferns had been hung, the road also strewn with flowers and greens from the church to the grove of oaks where an altar had been erected for Benediction. The procession formed at the church, little girls in white, carrying banners, coming first. Next came acolytes in red cassocks and lace cottas, followed by boys wearing red sashes and wreathes on their heads; after these, the peasant women in black dresses and white lace caps, their fine faces aglow with deep

spiritual devotion. It was an impressive sight to see these people worshipping in the grove, chanting and then kneeling in silence as the priest lifted up the Host in Benediction. The scene, as at Saint-Jean-du-Doigt, was reminiscent of old druid days, a more powerful witness even than the giant Menhir of Saint Samson standing not far away in another grove of oaks.

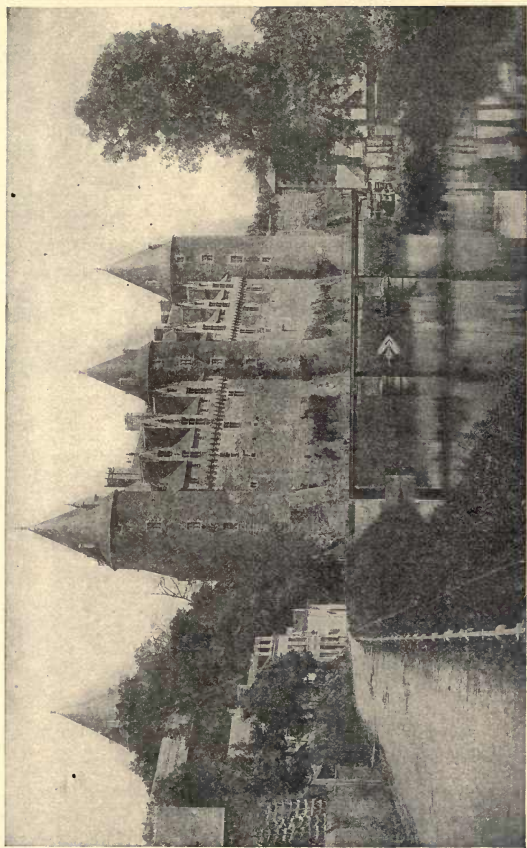
Wandering back by the winding river, a sudden turn revealed the old grey town caught in the gold glow of sunset, its crenellated walls and towers silhouetted against the azure sky. From the quay one can trace the road leading upward to the foot of the rue de Jerzual where stands the moss-grown bridge, its Gothic arches a yellow patch amid the green of the hill whose sheer sides are mirrored in the swift-flowing Rance. Brooding in the summer sunshine, Dinan sleeps upon its hill-top, sunk in a lethargy of dreams, the peace of the woods and hills dwelling in its heart, a peace that is atune to the cloistered songsters singing in the green-gold beeches, and to the soft murmur of the gleaming river wending its way ceaselessly toward the sea.

Across the low-lying Breton hills, on the edge of the forest of Broceliande, stands the superb old château of Josselin, its feudal thirteenth century

94 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

grimness and its exquisite fifteenth century beauty a mingling of delicacy and strength, of severity and a wealth of beauty, expressive of the proud de Rohans, who linked by blood and history with the greatest names of France, even royalty itself, still dwell within its walls. The château grips the edge of the sheer cliff above the Oust that like a silver thread winds its way southward between green fields and low scrub-clad hills. Josselin stands upon the site of an earlier château built in the eleventh century by one Odon, Comte de Porhoët, ancestor of the de Rohans; while about its walls a village soon grew up, so says the Breton chronicler, "under the protection of the good Virgin of Roncier and this Count who named the château after his eldest son, Josselin." Thus from its birth, Josselin was a seigneurial town, its character preserved even to-day in the loyal devotion of the townspeople to the de Rohan family.

Josselin was the ancient capital of the Comte de Porhoët, and divided its allegiance between the château and the mediæval church dedicated by the first Josselin to Notre Dame du Roncier. It has been a place of pilgrimage since 808, the year when a poor labourer while digging in a near-by field unearthed the miraculous statue of the



Château Josselin, Western Façade

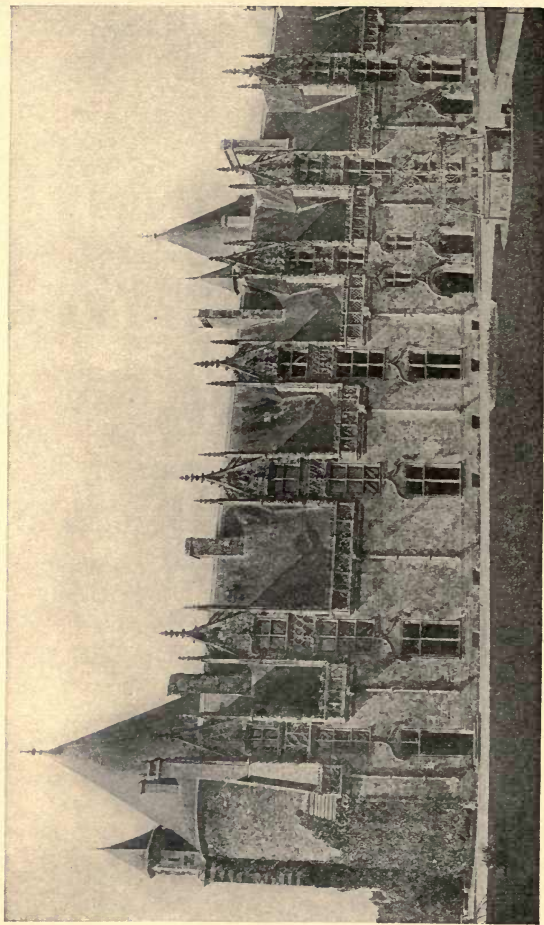
Blessed Virgin. The field where the statue was found is "at all seasons green and radiant with blossoming flowers," the peasants will tell you; "ever since, Madame, and this is the field." The most ancient portion of the church is the chapel of St. Catherine and the beautiful oratory of Marguerite de Clisson, now restored by the de Rohans. This chapel of St. Marguerite is separated from the choir by a wall pierced by two bays, a door and a large window filled with exquisite tracery, the design embodying the letter M, proving that de Clisson the Butcher was not wholly devoid of sentiment. The church opens upon a picturesque square from which radiate tortuous, lane-like streets bordered with quaint timbered houses, many of them, as in the rue St. Michel, faced with stone, embellished with sculptured ornaments, coats of arms and corbels, houses so ancient that they have seen the passing of Oliver de Clisson and Charles of Blois.

The eleventh century château was destroyed, the present one dating partly from the thirteenth century, partly from the fifteenth, and from its gates the Sire de Beaumanoir and his gallant company of thirty knights sallied forth to the famous combat of Mi-Voie. The Constable, Oliver de Clisson, dwelt here with his wife Marguerite de

96 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

Rohan, and during his reign the château was made more formidable, the defences augmented by the building of the donjon and also additional towers along the walls. In the wars with Jean V. de Montfort, Josselin became de Clisson's principal fortress, and during one of his absences, his wife Marguerite, with the heroism of her race, victoriously withstood a siege in 1393. After peace was declared, de Clisson became guardian for de Montfort's children. De Clisson's daughter Marguerite, an ambitious and unscrupulous woman, having married a son of Charles of Blois, hereditary enemy of de Montfort, wished her father to make way with these helpless children. Her father's response to this request was vigorous and to the point, for he promptly kicked her down stairs, she being known thereafter as Marguerite la Boiteuse.

Like Dinan, Josselin at the time of the League was one of the strongholds of the Duke de Mercœur; but after the League disbanded, Josselin ceased to be of much importance, falling partly into decay, a decay that was further assisted by the royal decree of 1629 commanding all inland castles to be dismantled. Of this great family of de Rohan, descendants of the ancient kings and dukes of Brittany, that of Alain, Vicomte de



Château Josselin: Fifteenth Century Façade

Rohan, is perhaps the most illustrious, a statesman and a knight of prowess who died in 1461, and who during the captivity of Duke Jean and his brothers was made by royal decree governor of Brittany. This Alain, whose two daughters, Marguerite and Catherine, were destined to be respectively the grandmother and the great-great-grandmother of two kings of France—Francis I. and Henry IV.—built the superb Renaissance façade facing the inner court of the château which is in such marked contrast to the severe massive exterior capped with its three round towers. A lovely driveway leads up to this Renaissance side of the château, the road winding from the entrance gate shaded with giant trees, and across the old moat colour-flecked now with flowers, to the magnificent fourteenth century donjon, austere and majestic despite its thick mantle of ivy. Standing beside this isolated tower, one gets a splendid view of the fifteenth century façade, the glory of Josselin, every detail from its ten dormer windows in pairs carved in heavy relief, to the high frontals flanked by richly chiselled pinnacles and the deep balustrade wrought like fine lace in an infinite variety of designs, geometrical, the rose, the ermine, the fleur-de-lis, and intertwined with the de Rohan devise

98 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

"A PLUS." Even the gargoyles, representing the heads of animals, are noticeably fine; the whole château, especially its façade, a superb monument of a by-gone age. Of granite it is fashioned even as the rock on which it stands. Near the keep is the castle well, its wrought iron cover embellished with the de Rohan coat of arms.

An atmosphere of wonderful simplicity blent subtly with princely magnificence pervades Josselin, and the note of fealty and loyal devotion for the House of de Rohan displayed by the old servitor, who with profound pride ushered us through the superb apartments, gave one a sense of slipping back into the days of royal France, the lilies not dead though trampled under foot, their bruised sweetness lingering among these Breton hills and valleys. Of a truth we had stepped into a royal abode inhabited still by a family who to-day, as through the centuries, are spending themselves in loyal service to France, their proud devise, "Roi ne puis, duc ne daigne, Rohan suis," sending them forth to their country's aid,—proving themselves thus worthy of so splendid an inheritance. From far across the hills one catches a last glimpse of the château bathed in the mellow sunset light, its massive walls and towers brooding lovingly above the century-stained town

whose pointed roofs seem reaching up for its protection; and at its feet, green fields cut by the silver thread of the river, fields that stretch out toward the romance-haunted forest of Broce-liande, the magic of Merlin spinning its web, its gossamer of dreams about the tiny hill-town crowned by its stately château,—Josselin, the eagle poised in flight, dwelling in the heart of Brittany's scrub-clad hills. Dinan overhanging the green valley of the Rance is no less feudal than Josselin; but Dinan is essentially a citadel type of hill-town, its power, its strength, resting largely with its armed citizens to defend it. Josselin, the seigneurial type, emphasises rather the glory of tradition, the splendour of inheritance, an inheritance so truly royal that it breathes of the spirit of a genuine democracy.

IV

TWO HILL-TOWNS OF QUERCY

I. CAHORS

AS Languedoc is the gateway to the south, so the ancient kingdom of Quercy is the borderland between north and south, and from its earliest history was the continual battleground of Gaul and Roman, of Visigoth and Frank, of Saracen and Hun, of Toulousian and Norman, of French and English, of Huguenot and Catholic. Cahors, the capital of the kingdom of Quercy, was the centre of this strife as it was to become a centre of culture and learning also. It bears the hall-marks of its struggles for independence, presenting too the impress of those passings,—its Roman remains, its quaint, winding streets bordered by fine mediæval houses, its curious Bysantine cathedral, its Tour des Pendus so indicative of the influence of the Spanish Moor, its wonderful Pont de Valentré, its best preserved and most imposing monument.

102 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

Like Uzerche, Cahors hints of the South, its sun-baked, narrow streets shadowed by white plastered houses and red-tiled, overhanging roofs; its gardens crammed with flowers and set with tropical trees,—magnolias, fig-trees, pomgranites and palms; its people of the dark Spanish type suggestive of the Basque country, of the inundation of the Saracens in the early days. Overhead the sky is cloudless, of that clear-cut blue-gold bespeaking the south; the air is redolent of flowers, and drowsy with the hum of mid-summer; while at night when the moon is full, locusts sing through the long hours, reminiscent of the silvery song of the *Kusa-Hibari* of the East of which Hearn has written so exquisitely. The simple dress of the people is another distinctive feature, especially that of the men,—the baggy corduroy trousers, the broad, red sash making a bright splash of colour at the waist, and so suited to their swarthy complexions, and the wide sombreros; while by their side trudges a mouse-grey *bourro* carrying panniers of crockery or vegetables, typical of Spain, of Provence, of the Orient. Even the patois possesses the rich soft cadence of the Iberian tongue, a remnant doubtless of the *Land-gue d'Oc* spoken in mediæval days.

Quercy was settled in the early days by the

Celtic Gauls, who, coming from central Asia, swept across the mountain barrier into this south-eastern corner of France, settling in Brittany and Ireland also. Fighters all, these Celts, or Carduci, yet possessed of a certain sensitiveness and culture so characteristic of them to-day, and it was these men of Quercy who with indomitable courage held out longest against Cæsar and his Roman cohorts. Uxellodunum, which some historians ascribe as the site of Cahors, put up such an heroic defence that Cæsar upon capturing the town commanded that all the prisoners' hands be cut off,—a blot surely upon Roman civilisation and culture. Of the Roman occupation, there is much evidence, the remains of a superb aqueduct, bits of a bridge, an amphitheatre and a theatre, and the Portail des Thermes, the best conserved monument of Roman civilisation extant in Quercy.

Cahors, called by the Romans Divona Cadurcorum, was a town of importance in those days, being one of the sixty Gallic cities to be made the capital of its district, and answerable only to the imperial government at Lyons for any outbreaks or disorders among the inhabitants. Roman occupation did much for the further development of culture among the Gauls, a culture into which now crept Greek as well as Roman influ-

ence; and their druidical worship gave place to Roman paganism. It was not until the sixth century that this little kingdom of Quercy was absorbed into the Frankish empire, when it became once more the theatre of devastating wars culminating in the invasion of Théodebert who burned Cahors in 573. It was at this period that the Carducians abandoned the low western end of the peninsula in favour of the hill-crest of the eastern side, the town clustered upon the heights made nigh impregnable by its natural defences,—the Lot and the sheer wall of rock bordering the river,—and augmented by walls and towers. The western wall of great height and thickness, to-day replaced by the fine shaded Boulevard de Gambetta, was strengthened by a wide moat; while the land side of the town was fortified by walls, a picturesque Barbican and the splendid Tour des Pendus or Tour de la Barre which are still standing. Thus Cahors was really reduced to half its size, much of the Roman portion of the town remaining without the walls.

For nearly a century, Cahors was under the domination of the Dukes, or Kings, of Aquitaine, and it was during this time that the Saracens, sweeping across the Pyrenees, captured Cahors, the imprint of their passing found in the archi-

ture, the Byzantine domes of the aisleless cathedral of St. Etienne being essentially Eastern. This exotic from the East is very curious in that it possesses no transepts, and that the nave of the church is lower by some fifteen steps than the entrance. The carvings are distinctly Byzantine, those in the deeply recessed north portal being especially fine; and everywhere in these carvings is intertwined a rose resembling the Tudor rose,—an English rose, perchance, blossoming in this fair corner of France. Or is it merely a forgotten rose of near-by Provence? The paintings in the choir are quite remarkable. The apse was once surmounted by two fortified watch towers, recalling the fortified tower of the church at Uzerche. The fifteenth century Gothic cloisters are very beautiful and picturesque, and in strange contrast to the Romanesque architecture of the cathedral, though marking another period of its growth.

The influx of the Saracens saw Cahors swearing fealty to the Counts of Toulouse, the kings really of the Midi, and for four hundred years they fought under the banner of these Visigothic overlords; but after the Albigensian Crusade, Cahors was plundered by the Normans and finally ceded to them by Saint Louis. It reverted to the

106 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

crown of France in 1287 only to again come into the possession of the English, being ceded to them anew during the Hundred Years' War by the shameful Treaty of Brétigny, the town surrendering to that famous knight of Edward III., Sir John Chandos; but Cahors remained at heart French, and never lost an opportunity to rise on the slightest provocation, a turbulence the English were never wholly able to suppress.

During this period Cahors became a centre of learning and culture, and through Pope John XXII., one of the early Popes of Avignon and a native of Cahors, came into close touch with Avignon. The picturesque rue de l'Université, narrow and winding and consisting throughout its length of a succession of arcades varying widely in style, passes the site of the University of Cahors. Founded by Pope John, and modelled after the Universities of Toulouse and Boulogne, the University for over four hundred years ranked first among its compeers, attracting to it such men as Cujas, Govea and François Roaldès, its fame spreading into all parts of France. The octagonal tower with its beautiful spiral staircase of the near-by Collège Pélegry was a dependency of the University, its purpose to enable a certain number of students by means of scholarships to con-



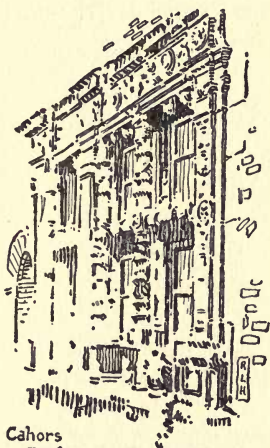
Cahors, Rue de l'Université.

108 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

tinue their studies at the University free of expense. It was this college which, during the Religious Wars, gave the first alarm of the approach of Henry of Navarre, as it was the last to yield to the king, a resistance for which they paid heavily when Henry finally took the town by assault in 1580, despite the heroism of the people led by the brave Sénéchal de Vezins. So Cahors became again and for the last time a crown possession. When in 1751 the University was incorporated with the University of Toulouse, the Collège Pélegry was absorbed by the Toulousian Collège Saint-Martial. The fifteenth century house of the Roaldès family, possessing still an exquisitely carved doorway and window, a spiral staircase and a fine old fireplace, was used, according to tradition, as a residence by Henry IV., and to this day bears his name, although still belonging to the Roaldès. One could wander for days through these quaint old streets of the populous quarter of the Badernes, finding at every turn some new object of interest, some beautiful bit of mediæval or Renaissance work that stirs one's æsthetic sense. This old part of Cahors reeks of mediævalism, its lane-like streets bordered, as in the rue Nationale or the rue des Boulevards, by houses dating from the thirteenth to the sixteenth

century, ranging in style from exquisite early Gothic to late Renaissance ornate in its richness of carving and design.

The Château du Roi, dating from the sixteenth century, stands upon the site of the ancient Sénéchal's Court, its great square tower dominating the Porte-Bullier quarter. In this ancient quarter, its sharp turnings, its ruined arches, its stone steps and innumerable zig-zags suggestive of a Jewish Ghetto which perchance it was, is the rue du Four-Saint-Catherine, the most curious of the many tortuous ways of this hill-town of Quercy.

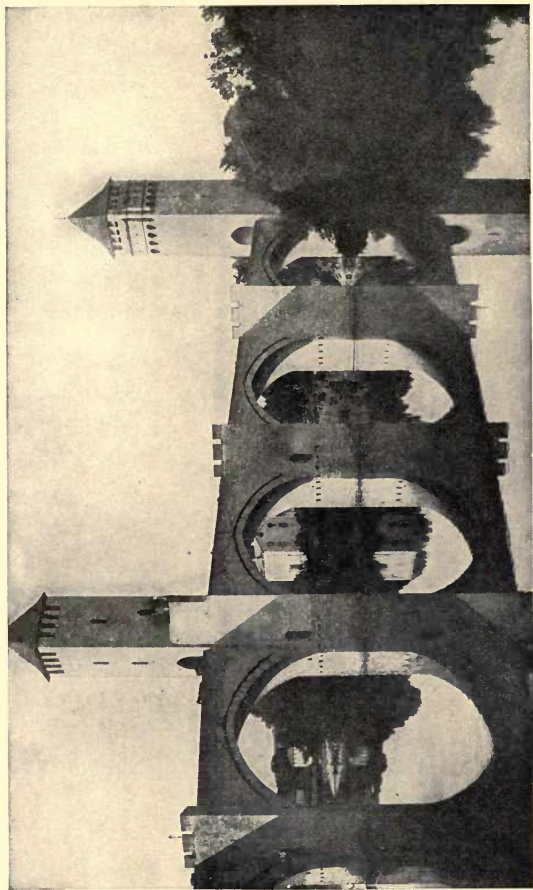


Cahors
Fenêtre de Renaissance

The town of the Middle Ages ends at the church of St. Bartholomew standing near the site of the ancient citadel, the church a beautiful though unfinished example of pure Gothic, possessing no apse, its belfry once part of the fortifications, as was the stately neighbouring tower of Pope

John's ruined palace. The Cours de la Chartreuse, now a lovely shaded walk, recalls the famous Carthusians of the Grande Chartreuse, the parent house in Dauphiny establishing a branch of their Order here in 1320 by the command of Pope John.

The glory of Cahors is the Pont Valentré, a superb example of fourteenth century secular work, its building attributed to an architect who bargained away his soul to the Devil, the bridge thus being named by the populous, the Pont du Diable. The work begun in 1308, was still unfinished in 1378, and the architect, so says a chronicler of the time, despairing of the slow progression of the work, which was likewise injuring his reputation, made a compact with the Devil, promising to surrender his soul in return for Satan's faithful obedience in executing all his commands without question or dispute. The compact signed and sealed, the construction advanced with astonishing rapidity, the Devil transporting the great blocks of stone to the workmen, a task which he accomplished with marvellous efficiency. As the towers neared completion, the soul of the architect became imperiled; but he was equal to the occasion, outwitting the Devil by a cleverly devised scheme, ordering him to carry in a sieve



Pont Valentré (Devil's Bridge), from the Lot, Cahors

the water necessary to the masons in dissolving the lime. Satan knew himself tricked, yet endeavoured to execute the command; but despite the swiftness of his flight, he reached the workmen each time with an empty sieve. Acknowledging his defeat, the wily demon planned swiftly his revenge. "Thou hast vanquished me," he said to the architect, "but one tower I shall make sport of in my own fashion." So he flew away leaving behind him a strong odour of sulphur. The bridge quickly reached completion, when suddenly the northeast angle of the central tower broke off. It was repaired only to crack and fall again, a sport that the Devil continued to delight in until in 1880 Monsieur Gout, an architect, circumvented him by carving upon the angle of the stone a figure of his satanic majesty endeavouring to tear down the work of the architect whose soul had escaped him. The Pont Valentré, which by means of a châtelet adjoined and was an integral part of the town walls, was restored in 1880 by this same Monsieur Gout from plans of Viollet le Duc, its three majestic towers, two of which are machicolated, and its superb arches commanding the Lot on the western side of the town, as the other two bridges, the thirteenth century Pont-Neuf and the Pont-Vieux originally of much the

112 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

same character, commanded the Lot on the south and east. The upper side of the bridge is heavily flanked with *avant-becs* which not only broke the force of the current, but prevented the ice flows in winter from jamming the bridge.

In this nigh-forgotten corner of France, then, one finds Cahors, once the capital of a kingdom and a centre of learning, its culture drawn largely from Provence with which it came in contact through its scholars, Cujas, Roaldès, and above all Pope John XXII., who reigned at Avignon, but whose heart dwelt ever within the walls of the place that gave him birth. All the culture of the ancient world, Greek, Roman, Eastern, gave of its best to this part of France, and Cahors absorbing, in turn gave back again an hundred-fold,—the splendid heritage of an indomitable race. Cahors, brooding upon its hill-top, and lulled by the drowsy hum of mid-summer and the soft swish of the Lot, dreams of the greatness of her past; while spanning the river on the west, the Pont Valentré in silent majesty guards still the entrance gate of this ancient city of the Gauls,—symbol of the militant spirit of its people, even as the giant tower of Pope John's palace holds in remembrance their culture, their high aspirations, these two characteristics the key-

note of a people who "made war not only upon men but upon nature and the gods." Cahors set about by hills, and rising upon the borderland of Provence, is redolent of the South, its culture, its art, its love of beauty harking back to the days of René of Anjou and of Pope John, that Golden Age of chivalry and romance, of culture and religious enthusiasm that was productive of great art, deep learning, religious devotion,—the age of the mystic who, visioning splendid visions and dreaming great dreams, resolved them into living realities.

II. ROCAMADOUR

ONE of the charms of France is its infinite variety, each province differing from another not only in physiognomy and customs, but oftentimes even in race. Brittany is primitive. Rocamadour, on the other hand, dreams in the aftermath of an historic past that includes the civilisation and the culture of the Golden Age. The romantic atmosphere of the troubadour and the trouvère lingers amid its rock-hewn solitudes; Provence, the South, and the magic of the East haunt its silences; the song of Roland floats up the valley echoing the war-cry of Roncesvalles, the struggle between Orient and Occident.

The romantic background of Brittany lies in the magic of its woods and hills, its emerald sea, the primitiveness of its people. The romantic background of Rocamadour is as richly coloured as a rare old tapestry, and as closely crowded with heroes and picturings of their valiant deeds. Kings, knights, ecclesiastics and crenellated towers loom up upon this background of her past, a brilliant pageant of chivalric splendour, ecclesiastical

magnificence, Renaissance culture, following along the "Way of the Saint" that winds up the steep to the shrine of Saint Amadour. He was a servant of the Blessed Virgin, so says the twelfth century chronicler, Robert de Thorigny, who, in the first century, at her command, came out of the East going over seas and across mountains, and taking up his abode at last amid the grey solitudes of this desolate gorge. Thus Rocamadour, holding within its heart the hermit's shrine, has ever been set apart as sacred, the holiest spot in France, where king and peasant alike approached upon their knees, chanting in unison *Ave Maria!* the song that has made vibrant the deep silences of the lonely gorge through long centuries of worship; the song that even now floats upward into the golden stillness of the September air when from far and near, pilgrims gather to keep her great *fête* of the year,—the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin.

As in a tapestry exquisite landscape vistas intersperse the brilliant pageant of massed figures, so at Rocamadour Nature enhances the scene. A road stretching monotonously across the rude, arid wastes of the Causses of Gramat, passes after four or five kilometres through a tunnel rough-hewn out of the crest of the hill. A sharp turn at the

116 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

far end of it swings the road suddenly to the edge of the plateau, and from the heights there lies revealed all the grandeur, the stern, wild beauty of the gorge, the picturesqueness of the mediæval hill-town gripping the precipitous sides with the grimness of the eagle who feels the all-mastering power of the giant cliffs that overshadow it. Far below the silvery music of the Alzou murmurs dreamily as it wends its way along the gorge, skirting the huddling houses hedged in by crumbling ramparts and crowned by the swallow-tailed turrets of the château which broods lovingly above their bizarre, grizzled roof-tops. Ordinarily, the hill-towns clustering about the château are the outgrowths of its presence. The château was the centre of their life, the sign and seal of feudalism. Not so Rocamadour, hill-town of the fourth type. Here the town as at Mont-Saint-Michel and at Le Puy grew not about a château, but a shrine,—that rock-hewn sanctuary of Saint Amadour.

The road drops swiftly to the valley, following along the edge of the ravine and entering the village by the Porte du Figuier, a stalwart bulwark of defence that is further augmented by a second gate, the Porte Salmon, which is surmounted by a donjon, and which leads into the principal street of Rocamadour. This rue de la Couronnerie re-



Rocamadour from the Valley

calls the crowning of Henry of the Short Hammer, a son of Henry II. of England, who was crowned here King of Aquitaine. Besides the great flight of stone steps that leads up to the sanctuaries, and close to the Porte Hugon, rise the massive remnants of the ruined Château de la Charette, of whose origin history traces but a dimmed record, yet determining it as part of the giant network of defence that surrounds this rock-bound shrine. These fortifications may be traced to the solitary tower standing by the Alzou beyond the Porte Basse, grim and solitary, a silent witness of a mighty past.

The long, straight, massive staircase, two hundred and sixteen stone steps in all, seems a veritable Jacob's ladder, leading upward and losing itself in the infinitude of blue, the steep, century-worn way that leads of a truth to the very gate of the sanctuary, into the Holy of Holies,—the pilgrims' way by which kings and princes, prelates and monks, knights and peasants, a devout retinue, have climbed upon their knees, reciting at each step the angelic salutation. First among the pilgrims who came to worship at the shrine, was Roland, the mighty warrior who, with Olivier, Ogier, and Anseis, three of Charlemagne's trusty knights, paused to do honour to the Blessed Vir-



Stone Staircase Leading to the Sanctuaries.

gin on their way to Roncesvalles in 778. Here, too, came Saint Louis, his brothers and his mother, Queen Blanche in 1245. Still later came Charles le Bel, Philippe de Valois, and the cruel Louis XI., who sought to assuage his accusing conscience with pious acts of devotion.

The steps lead up to a courtyard partly surrounded by hostelryes, in former times used as residences by the canons. On one side rises the Fort, the ancient palace of the bishops of Tulle. The thick wall, flanked by an imposing round tower, is pierced by a beautiful Gothic archway through which access is gained to the sacred enclosure. Fortified at every point, yet touched with a delicacy of construction in its triple and quadruple bays, divided by slim pilasters bespeaking the beauty of the South, it stands dominating yet dominated by the rugged mass of rock overshadowing it. Beside the archway a picturesque beggar, with southern eyes looking appealingly into yours, stretches out a lean, brown hand for coppers. Passing beneath the Porte du Fort, one reaches, after a stiff climb of seventy-six steps, the Parvis, an inner court, the heart of the sanctuary, and completely surrounded by its seven chapels and the towering rocks that on one side quite shut out the sky. Of these seven chapels,

the twelfth century Church of Saint Sauveur is the most imposing, the Baptistry of Saint Jean the most beautiful, the Chapel of Notre Dame the most holy, and above its portals are centred the worship and devotion of the pilgrims. To the left of its flamboyant portal is the rock-hewn cave in which the good Saint Amadour lived. His body was found here in 1166 and was removed with great pomp and ceremony to the crypt of Saint Amadour. When Rocamadour was demolished in 1562 by an over-zealous Huguenot captain, one Bessonies by name, Saint Amadour's body was burned. Afterward his ashes were reverently gathered by the faithful, who crept back to the scorched ruins, and placed in a reliquary over the altar in the crypt, where they now rest undisturbed.

The Miraculous Chapel of Notre Dame is built in the rock, its west wall but the rude, chiselled rock—strong, firm, impenetrable—and blackened now by the lighted candles that for centuries have been kept burning bright, even as the love that pervades the sanctuary. Its walls are covered with banners, pictures, inscriptions, votive offerings of all sorts that the pilgrims for centuries have left in thanksgiving. Above the altar stands the deeply venerated Black Virgin, a wooden figure



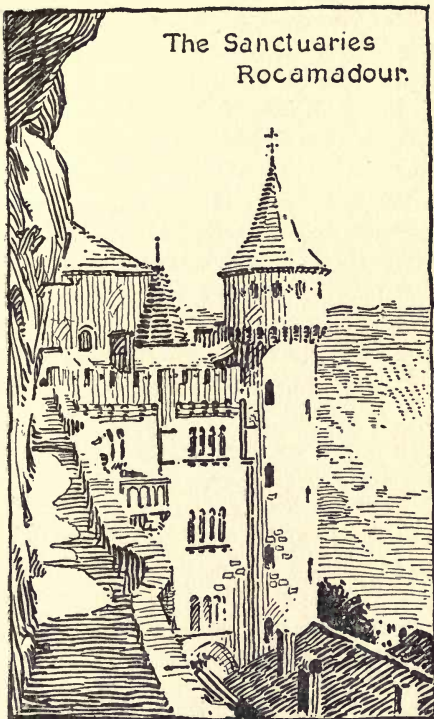
Chapel Saint-Michel
Within the Sanctuaries

122 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

said to have been carved by Saint Amadour during his solitary sojourn among these hills. From the central arch hangs the miraculous bell, dating back to the sixth century, of which legend recounts that it "counteracts any evil manifestations on the part of Demons or those who deal in Diabolism."

Clinging to a great mass of overhanging rock, the tiny eleventh century chapel of Saint Michel overtops the rest of the pinnacle-set courtyard. The walls of the apse are decorated with quaint old frescoes of the twelfth century, representing Christ surrounded by angels and the four Evangelists. From an exterior gallery the much-loved Bishop of Cahors gives his benediction to the crowd of pilgrims in the courtyard far below. To one in the gallery looking down upon it, empty and silent now, rise the faces of that great multitude, faces eager, expectant, emotion-swept, dark, passionate, a wholly southern type that tells of a one-time intercourse with the people beyond the Pyrenees, an intercourse that harks back to the time of Roland and the field of Roncesvalles gleaming with the "shine of helmets studded with gold, of shields and white broided hauberks, of lances and gonfanons," when the "Saracens of Spain covered the hills and the val-

The Sanctuaries
Rocamadour.



124 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

leys, the heaths and the plains." It was on his way to Roncesvalles that Roland paused to make a pilgrimage at Rocamadour, vowing his jewelled sword Durandal a votive offering to Our Lady, yet leaving instead its weight in gold, that he might use Durandal in succoring France from the Saracen hordes that were threatening her borderlands. So Roland went forth with Olivier and his host to Roncesvalles, and, dying there upon that bloody field, he sent the mighty Durandal, "in whose golden hilt was many a relic," back to Rocamadour, where it hung in the chapel of the Black Virgin until in the twelfth century, when it disappeared, stolen by the vandal hand of one whose greed outweighed his reverence. A heavy iron sword, a replica of Durandal, is embedded in the east wall of this Chapel of Saint Michel, keeping bright the memory of Roland.

The people of Rocamadour are a simple, pastoral people, tilling the soil where its barrenness will yield; growing grapes along the stony slopes of the ravine; haying by the banks of the Alzou; herding their cows and their goats along the hedges; driving their oxen over the steep, winding roads. They are a swarthy race, with large, melting, dark eyes and black, curling hair, their beauty and picturesqueness hinting not only of Spain, but

of the East, that indefinable trace of the Orient which the Saracen has stamped indelibly upon this part of Occidental Europe,—on the architecture, on the race. Their voices are soft and musical; their language is a remnant of the *Langue d'Oc*, echoing of the troubadours and their minstrelsy.

Passing from the Parvis through a long, dark, arched passage, one comes to the Way of the Cross, a winding woodpath marked every fifty feet or so by a beautifully wrought station, the gift of the Bishop of Cahors. The figures in the fourteenth and last station represent the Entombment, and are life-sized, made doubly impressive by the fact that they stand in a cave hewn out of the rock. Above, on the summit of the plateau, stands a giant wooden cross that during the last century a band of pilgrims carried all the way to the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem.

The château, save for its deep green garden, is neither beautiful nor picturesque. Its outstanding walls and towers, which on the plateau side were originally protected by a moat, are gone. Only its swallow-tailed inner walls remain. Yet, from them, one gets wonderful distant views, and can grasp best the marvel and impressiveness of the situation of the gorge and the town. Here surely the grandeur of Nature and the daring of

126 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

man are blent. Silence is everywhere, the dreamy silence of late afternoon, the dull gold of sunset brooding upon the stern, wild beauty of the cliffs across the quiet sky. On the other side of the of the château. In the west, billowy clouds, shot with the purple gold of sunset, drifted dreamily across the quiet sky. On the other side of the valley a trail of ox-carts made their way along the Cahors road, the song of the drivers floating upward to the heights. Far up the gorge one can see another road winding down the valley, the pilgrims' road, the silence tinged by the faint echo of sleigh bells, a party returning, perhaps, from Padirac, where science ten years ago revealed the marvellousness of Nature,—the *gouffres* and stalactite chambers of the nether world.

The twilight deepens, and the shadows turn the dull gold of the sun upon the cliff to blue. Far below, the hushed murmur of the town gathering to rest rises to the château walls. From the other side of the valley, the silvery tinkle of goats' bells and the intermittent shrillness of a night bird intensify the stillness of the sapphire dusk lighted by the spirit world of stars. Beyond the barren Causses of Gramat surges the tumult of the world; but here in the valley of the Alzou there dwells Peace,—the peace that has crept into the hearts of

the pilgrim hosts who have journeyed thither
down the ages to worship and lay their gifts at
a shrine.

ROCAMADOUR

The air was still ; no sound
Stirred the deep silence of the gorge profound :
Whose stone-scarred sides
Are worn by rude centuries of tides,——
Of changing seasons, and the march of men
Chanting their Aves. Thus I saw them when
Sitting beside the stream in dreamy mood
They passed me by, an eager, motley crowd
Bearing the pilgrim's staff, and sandal shod.
Kings, knights and beggars, up the steep incline
They pushed their way to worship at the shrine
Of Amadour. And thus I see them now :
Love's ideal claiming still the pilgrim's vow.

V

THREE HILL-TOWNS OF LANGUEDOC

I. NAJAC, CARCASSONNE, LASTOURS

LANGUEDOC is the gateway to the South, its country wild and beautiful, a land truly of low hills and green, winding valleys. Its rugged hillsides are wooded with locusts, their soft green interspersed with grey outcrops of rock, splashed with purple heather. The fields and hedgerows are colour-flecked with flowers—pinks, cornflowers; while in the gardens oleanders, pink and white, bloom with all the rich extravagance of the South, Provence, the East even. And thus in the quiet valley of the Aveyron lies Najac in the early morning of an August day, the dew still glistening upon the tangle of gorse, heather and blackberry vines that clamber up the sheer, towering cliff, crowned by the imposing ruins of the château. Like Uzerche, Najac is built upon a rockbound peninsula, surrounded on three sides by the sparkling Aveyron; but this hill-town is

130 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

distinctly of the feudal type rather than the communal, the distinguishing feature of Uzerche; for the town straggling along the hilltop in the valley of the Aveyron is dominated by its château, to which it owes its birth.

From the old bridge bordered by the picturesque, moss-grown mill, a steep path winds up the hill, and along it, superb oxen, their eyes blindfolded with fringed-face cloths, made their way slowly up to the town, accompanied by dark-skinned, velvety-eyed peasants, whose day's work had doubtless begun at cock-crow. A final bend in the path revealed the outer town gate, the ways dividing just inside it, one leading through a second archway to the narrow, abrupt ascent to the château and the fine old thirteenth century church that originally stood within the château's outer walls; the second turning sharply to the left and up into the heart of the mediæval town with its magnificent monolith fourteenth century fountain, and its characteristic Place. The town, with its quaint cobbled streets, is steeped in its feudalistic atmosphere, untouched by modernity, as were the people who gathered in the little street to explain in their harsh patois that Marie—the custodian of the château's keys—had gone out into the fields to gather mushrooms. These people are

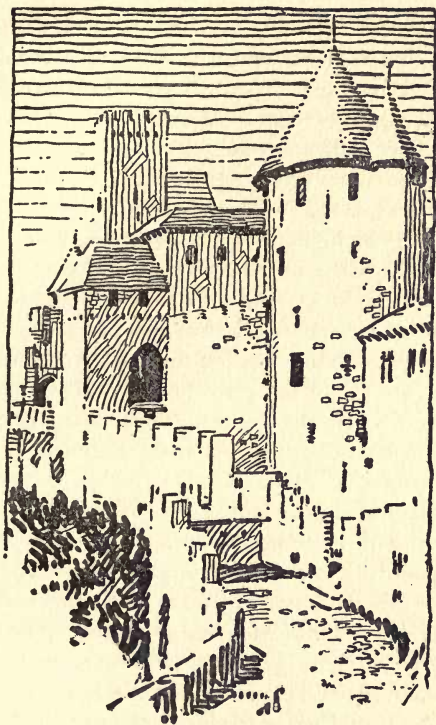


Najac.
Street, Château;

132 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

of the swarthy, southern type, Spanish almost, hinting of the days of Roland, when Spaniard and Saracen swept across the Pyrenees to leave their impress not only upon the architecture, but upon the race. There were the old women with their knitting, one tending her geese; the man, picturesque in his loose corduroys and red sash, a blue beret on the back of his head, standing in his doorway, peeling an onion; the old man with long hair and clad in homespun, pausing to give matrimonial advice to a pretty girl on the edge of the crowd; while the tragic, sad-eyed hunchback, calling up the figure of the count's jester, seemed so especially to reflect the picturesque mediævalism of the grey-walled town. All talking at once, they berated Marie for not being on hand to attend to her duties as custodian. But, "with Marie it was always so," they said. At last a boy whom the jingle of a few coppers had beguiled into seeking for her, returned triumphant, Marie, a great basket of mushrooms on her arm, trudging along in his wake.

There seems little recorded history connected with the château, save that it was built by Bertrand of Toulouse in 1105, modified by Alphonse of Poitiers in the thirteenth century, and finally destroyed by Louis XIII. The distinctive fea-



Walls from Tour Visigoth,
La Cite', Carcassonne

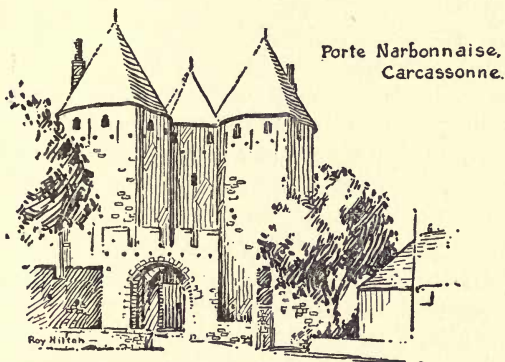
134 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

ture of the château is its round donjon, one hundred feet in height, and with walls of such thickness as to admit of a stairway and corridors. These corridors connected the donjon with the five other stalwart towers flanking the great rectangular court, which was in turn guarded by an outer enclosure of walls and towers. Close beside the keep, and guarded by a low tower, is the castle wall, while on one floor of the keep—that stern old relic of feudal days—one finds the remains of a chapel marked by bits of carving, the one note of beauty within those frowning walls. From the top of this giant tower, a bell still tolls the curfew and the angelus. Thus to-day the château dominates and regulates the daily life of the little town.

Standing on the battlements of this hoary old tower, with its wonderful sweep of wooden hills, of quiet valleys and of purling streams, one seems to see into the historied past of that southern land lying beyond the Montagnes Noires. The history of Najac is inevitably interwoven with that of those proud Tolosan counts to whom she owes her birth, and whose deeds of valour reached even to the East, where Bertrand, her founder and a crusader, died fighting for the Cross.

Thus at Najac, peering through the gateway of

Languedoc, we penetrate to its very heart—Carcassonne—the city of dreams, the fairy city standing upon a hill in silent grandeur, the power and glory of its past summed and gathered up within its walls—walls basking now in the soft, shimmering sunshine of midsummer, dreaming, per-



chance, of those far-off days when Romans, Franks and Visigoths struggled for supremacy. Stronger still is the deepened note of the South touched out everywhere, in oleanders, pomegranates, figs and flowers, in people, in customs, in the high-peaked horse-collars, the panniered donkeys, the oxen, the vineyards.

This great forest of towers rising up in the val-

136 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

ley of the Aude, holds not only the key to the passes of the Pyrenees, whose snow-capped peaks lie to the south, but guards also the roads to the sea, to Narbonne, to Toulouse, and to those roads stretching northward to lose themselves in the deep-cut valleys of the Montagnes Noires.

Carcassonne marks three distinctive epochs in its history, epochs recorded in its massive masonry as well as in its archives. The Roman period, when it was called a "noble city," lasted from about 70 B. C. to the early part of the fifth century, when the Empire disintegrated. The second period began with the coming of the victorious Visigoths, their domination extending from the fifth to the eighth century. It was during this period that Carcassonne was made impregnable; for the Visigoths of all the barbarians adopted most quickly and effectively the art of the Roman builders. From the eighth century, when the Moors of Spain broke the power of the Visigoths, to the twelfth century, little is known of Carcassonne. At the beginning of the twelfth century, however, Simon de Montfort with inquisitorial zeal perpetrated his cruelties in his efforts to crush the Albigensians. This led to the overthrow of the Trincavel counts, then in power, and to the subsequent ushering in of the third and most bril-

liant period, when Carcassonne's history became united with that of France under Louis VIII. Louis IX., Saint Louis, and his son Philip le Hardi, not only strengthened the work of the Romans and of the Visigoths, but built the outer walls and towers; and for further protection, Louis IX. refused permission to the inhabitants of the faubourgs to rebuild on that side of the river. This led to the founding of the Lower Town, which is still spoken of as the new town, despite its mediæval birth. A note of beauty also marks the work of this period, as evidenced in the carved keystones and corbels in some of the towers, and in the battlemented cathedral church of Saint Nazaire, where most truly beauty and strength have met together. In this old church, standing just inside the walls of the Cité, one finds a thirteenth century bas-relief depicting the siege of Toulouse under the same dread Simon de Montfort of Albigensian renown. When in the fourteenth century, all of Languedoc had surrendered to Edward the Black Prince, Carcassonne alone remained impregnable, proudly flaunting the lilies of France from its turrets, defiant of English domination.

Across the valley of the Aude, some ten miles from Carcassonne, in the valley of Cabardés, and encircled by the Montagnes Noires, four châteaux

138 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

guard the road—the old Roman road—leading from Carcassonne to Mazumet. Perched upon four craggy peaks, these four châteaux—Cabaret, Tour Régine, Fleur-Espine and Quertineux—command from their eminence on the hill three ravines, Bellanet, Grésillon and Orbiel. These hoary sentinels, “defendants of the valley of Cabardés,” so silent and so isolated, add to the picturesqueness, the wild, fantastic beauty of the place, steeping it in the romance of those far-off days when the Visigoth ruled the land, days when marauding knights, perchance, swooped like eagles from those heights to prey upon some unsuspecting foe.

The history of Lastours, like the history of Najac, is veiled in obscurity, save that the châteaux date back to the sixth century, and that their “legal existence” only came to an end in 1789. As an outpost of Carcassonne, they were strategically of great importance, proving themselves impregnable in two specific instances at least, in their stubborn resistance of the two attacks of Simon de Montfort. The last siege was raised only after favourable and honourable terms were accorded to the chatelain. A night and day guard of fifty men, together with their maintenance, were entrusted to the inhabitants of Lastours and of the

neighbouring villages, who in return were exempt from going to war. As late as 1768, cannon were placed upon the ramparts—the last expression of their outworn strength. Within the walls of the Quertinneux stands the tiny chapel of Saint Catherine, and as late as the eighteenth century a yearly service was held there on the thirtieth of May. Even in its crumbling incompleteness, the chapel is a gem of Gothic art, its origin due, doubtless, to the unquiet conscience of one of the lords of Cabaret. Thus again, in the midst of stern reality, we catch the thirteenth century note of beauty expressing itself in carven capital and vaulted arch.



Château Quertinneux
Chapel of St Catherine

The village of Lastours scrambling picturesquely up the abrupt sides of the hill across the valley from the châteaux is none the less dominated by them, as may be seen if one follows the path back of the town to the summit where one gets a magnificent panoramic view of those four

gaunt towers, the barren hills, the deep-set valleys, the rugged grandeur of the distant mountains. Southern exuberance is here, as at Carcassonne. The hillsides, rudely terraced, are silver-green with olive trees, the soft, shimmering tone colour offset now and again, by the stately form of a cedar of Lebanon rising dark-limbed against the deep blue southern sky. Dark bits of rock festooned with wild clematis, jut out here and there, while purple heather, broom, wild roses and flowers of brilliant hue carpet the steep slopes in oriental splendour. And, as if in protest to this southern luxuriance, one finds clambering up one side of the valley a young forest of sturdy oaks, chestnuts, and firs, reminders of those northern invaders the Franks, who, in the old days, battled for the supremacy of this southern land.

Great clouds sweep silently across the summer sky, resting upon hill and grim castle walls and towers. The dreamy stillness deepens as the shadows lengthen. No longer the clash of arms or shout of battle cry echoes in that valley of Cabardés set about by hills. Only deep peace, the deep peace of the hills, broods upon its heights, symbolised by the dove hovering in the sunset glow about the gaunt old tower of Cabaret.

Thus, looking through this gateway to the

NAJAC, CARCASSONNE, LASTOURS 141

South—Languedoc—whether at Najac, at Carcassonne or at Lastours, we catch something at least of the beauty, the exotic redolence and luxuriance belonging so essentially to Provence and to the mystic East.

VI

THREE HILL-TOWNS OF PROvence

I. ARLES

AS Languedoc is the gateway to the South, so Provence is the South, the South of the Orient, its Eastern heritage revealed in all the rich luxuriance, the mystic beauty, the ancient splendour and magnificence in which this land of Provence is steeped, a land stamped indelibly both in its architecture and in its race with the marks of its ancient conquerors—Greek, Roman, Goth and Frank. It is a land redolent of flowers, a land of sunshine and of laughter, a land of music where one can still catch the minor strain of the troubère's song and the plaint of the pan-pipes mingling with the far-off chant of the sea. It is a land where austere pagan beauty and mediæval luxuriance jostle each other, marking the ebb and flow of the tides that have swept across this fair land of the troubadour, tides that have left their impress upon the faces and features of the people

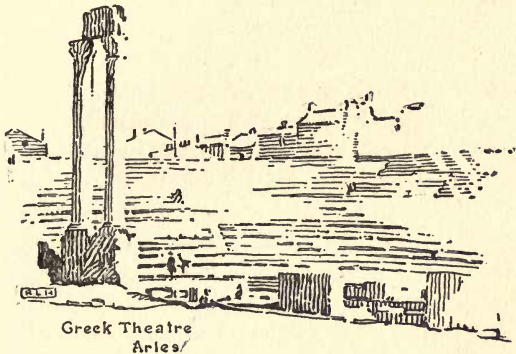
144 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

as well as upon the half-ruined monuments of each successive epoch—those monuments that speak so eloquently of its history.

Arles, the ancient capital, is distinctive, not as one locality is distinctive from another, but distinctive as Provence is from the rest of France; a nation set apart, belonging to France, yet not of it. It belongs essentially to the two races from which it sprang. Greek it is in spirit, Greek in race; Roman in temper and in architecture. Founded 2000 B. C., Arles was known as *Ar-lait*, near the waters, because of its proximity to the Rhone. Even in those early days it was a port of importance, an importance that to some extent it holds to-day. But before it was colonised by Marius and became the rival of Marseilles, this Gallic Rome was known to the Massilians and was called by them *Thelme*; and it is this Greek and Roman aspect that prevails to-day. Arles pervades one with a sense of its imperial past. Its grey massiveness has a lofty beauty, a pagan sternness that dominate the remnants of its mediæval life.

The history of Arles may be divided into five periods—Greek Arles, Roman Arles, Early Christian Arles, Mediæval Arles and Arles of to-day, the Arles of Mistral and his confrères of the *Félibres*;

and of each of these five periods one can still find traces. Of Greek Arles, there remains that glorious monument, the Greek theatre of which the banks of seats, the dressing-rooms and two beautiful marble columns are still standing. During the last few years there has been a revival of

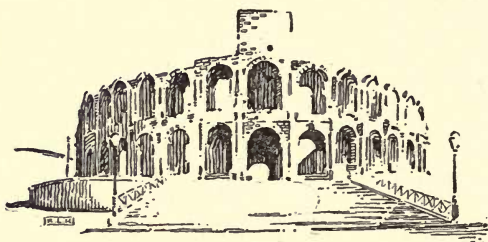


Greek drama by the Comédie Française, and here once more the stately lines of the *Œdipus* can be heard. Built in the last century B. C. during Roman occupation, the theatre is yet distinctly Greek work, and in 1651, among the crumbling ruins, was discovered the Venus of Arles, that triumph of Greek art.

Of Roman Arles, perhaps the most distinctive

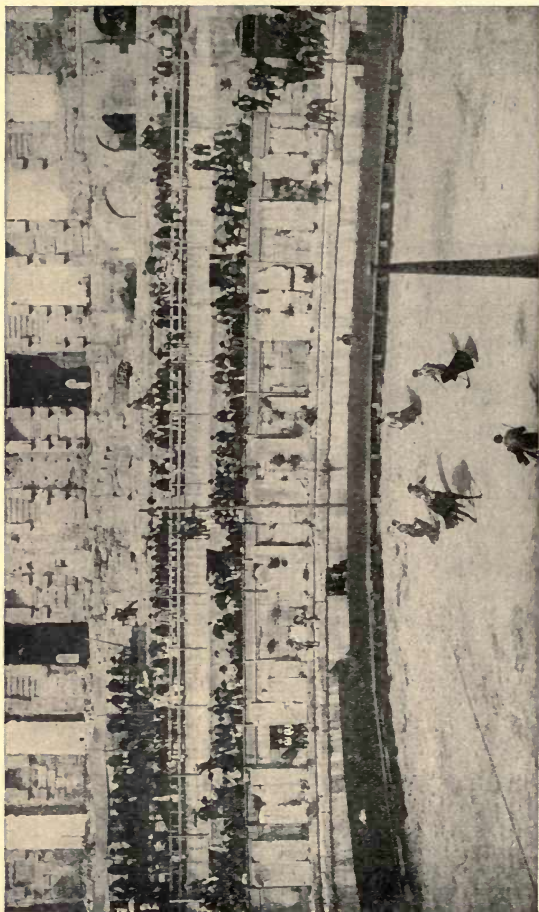
146 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

monument is the great amphitheatre, built in the first century A. D. It is characteristic of the Romans as the theatre with its more æsthetic and intellectual appeal is characteristic of the Greeks. Here in the early days Christians fought with wild beasts, and gladiators fought each other to the death to gratify the populi. Here to-day de-



Roman Amphitheatre
Arles

scendants of that same crowd urge matador, torreador and picador to more and more daring deeds of prowess. One feels this very strongly if one attends a "Courses Provençales" in the old arena, the stone parapet hung with gaily-coloured flags as for a festa. Strolling through the narrow, winding streets, one comes suddenly upon the old arena, its three hoary towers—the mark mediævalism put upon this work of the Roman builders—rising, gaunt and grim, against the blue



Roman Amphitheatre at Arles. The Bull Fight

southern sky, flinging defiance at modernity. In sight of the arena one becomes imbued with a sense of a pagan world, of Rome in all its pride and cruel strength. From the church of Saint Trophimus to the arena is but a stone's throw; yet in that short space we step from the mediæval into that pagan age which even to-day dominates Provence. One sees it in the crowd gathered at the entrance way to watch the bulls driven across the arena to their pens beneath the stadium. One is overwhelmed by it during the "Course," when the superb matador, "Chef de Quadrille," Poulyfils and his young son, arouse the audience to wild enthusiasm, as with easy grace they meet the charges of the angry bull. The "Courses Provençales" differ from the regular bull-fight in that the bull is not killed, but only teased and played with for about twenty minutes, and that no horses are in the ring to be gored to death. Still one gets the effect as the bull trots into the ring tossing its head, then pausing suddenly, stands with head upraised, defiant, maddened by the music, the roar of the crowd, the blinding sunlight after the darkness. Attracted by the matador's red cloak, the bull lunges forward, head down, tail high, to be met with the prick of the

148 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

barbed banderillas which the banderillero deftly sticks into his shoulders. The "Courses Libres" followed the "Courses Provençales," and proved to be a free-for-all performance for a purse, in which any one might enter at his own risk. The object was to remove a rosette from the bull's forehead while he was in the act of charging, an entertainment that was very diverting, the crowd reaching a high pitch of excitement when one man pursued by the bull had his leg pinned to the fence as he was in the act of vaulting it.

Arles became great under imperial patronage, and during the reign of Constantine Christianity became the accepted religion, Constantine being the first Christian emperor. Thus the palace of Constantine, Byzantine in its architecture, and built in the fourth century A. D., belongs not only to the Roman period, but also to the early Christian. Here Constantine and the empress Fausta, his wife, lived, and here their eldest son was born. What Lyons was to Claudius and the earlier emperors, Arles was to Constantine; and for several centuries Arles was the centre of Christendom. Nineteen church councils were held here, the most famous being the Council of Arles in 314. In the fourth century

the Bishop of Arles was the metropolitan of all Gallic Narbonensis, a power that in the fifth century brought about the dispute between Bishop Hilary of Arles and Leo the Great, the then Bishop of Rome. The Aliscamps also links the Roman and early Christian periods; and, renowned both as the Roman and early Christian place of burial, it was immortalised by Dante in the Canto IX of the Inferno.

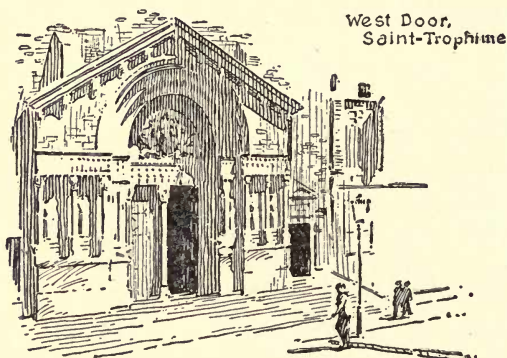
“And I——

Soon as I was within, cast round my eye,
And see on every hand an ample plain,
Full of distress and torments terrible,
Even as at Arles where stagnant grows the Rhone.
The sepulchres make all the place uneven,
So likewise did they there on every side.”

Looking down the long avenue of stately cypresses, one sees ranged between them the ancient covered Roman sarcophagi, with now and again a Merovingian tomb. Standing beneath the beautiful arch of Saint Césaire, one sees at the far end the chapel of Saint Honorat, its dedication bringing to mind that famous apostle of the Iles de Lérins, who late in life became Bishop of Arles. Arles owes its conversion to Christianity to Saint Trophimus, a disciple of Saint Paul, who

150 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

came to Gaul in the third century. It was after his death and burial in these sacred precincts that the Aliscamps became so holy a place of pilgrimage. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century so famous did the shrine become that bodies were placed in rude caskets and set afloat on the swift-



flowing Rhone, trusting that they might drift ashore and find a final resting-place in the Aliscamps. In the sixteenth century, after the removal of Saint Trophimus' body to the church built in his honour, the spoliation of the Aliscamps began, many of the tombs being carried off by the Marquis de Saint-Chamond, a brother of Cardinal Richelieu.

The church of Saint Trophimus, built on the foundations of the Roman Prætorium and called the "perfect flower of Provençal Romanesque," marks the beginning of mediæval Arles, which, under the Merovingians, became the capital of Provence. Later, under Boson, it became first the



Cloisters, S. Trophime, Arles.

capital of the kingdom of Burgundy, and in 933, under Rudolph Welf, King of Burgundy, capital of the Burgundians, under the title of the Kingdom of Arles. In the twelfth century Arles became a republic; in the thirteenth, it submitted to Charles of Anjou, Count of Provence, and afterwards was annexed to France in 1482. The

152 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

twelfth century portal of the church, deep-set and richly carved, is very fine. It is supported by six beautiful columns, between which are figures of saints and scriptural subjects. The figure of the



Statue of Saint-Trophime

Christ in the centre is markedly Byzantine in character.

The cloisters are unique and among the most beautiful in France. In them we get a mingling of Greek, Roman and Byzantine art; of Romanesque and Gothic also. The figures and elaborate

designs so finely chiselled are as perfect as if fresh from the sculptor's hands. The carving is stamped with the rich imagination of the artists who have wrought so wonderfully these living



Cloisters, St Trophime
Chapiteau du XII^e siècle

pictures in stone, a rich medley of legend and the fantastic, of the mythological, the apocryphal, the scriptural, woven with the lavish beauty of the luxuriant East into a harmonious whole. And here in the brooding stillness pervading these exquisitely carved cloisters we find expressed all the

154 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

beauty, all the poetry, all the music that is indeed the very soul of Provence, the Provence that, echoing still of Greece, of pagan Rome, finds expression to-day in Mistral and his confrères of the *Félibres*.

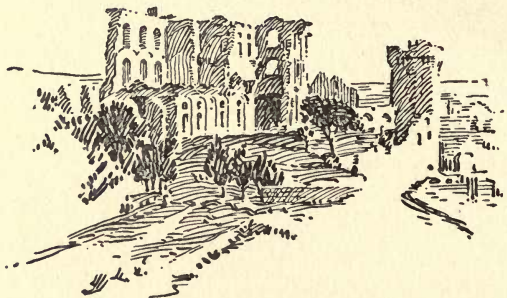
II. MONTMAJOUR AND LES BAUX

THE names of the great abbey of Montmajour and of Les Baux are linked both architecturally and historically with Arles, as, indeed, all three were governed by the powerful seigneurs of Les Baux. Even as late as the Middle Ages, Montmajour was an island, and to it in the third century, so legend relates, came Saint Trophemus, and thither also flocked his native converts. Here in the tenth century Benedictine monks founded their abbey upon the shrine of the good saint, the land being a donation of the seigneurs of Les Baux. Even in its ruined incompleteness, Montmajour remains, according to a French writer of note, "at once the most imposing ruins, the most ancient and the most powerful of France."

The enormous empty church with its wonderful hexagonal crypt supported by great pillars, is most impressive; while in the unearthly green light filtering in through the tinted windows, one can in imagination see cowed figures flitting to and fro among the stalwart pillars. The thirteenth century cloisters are less ornate than those

156 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

of Saint Trophemus at Arles, and flooded with the golden radiance of the southern sun, possess a beauty almost Greek, a chaste loveliness that is all their own. The main building dates back only to the stiff architecture of the eighteenth century, and its ruins do not lend themselves to



Montmajour: The Abbey Ruins.

picturesqueness. The holy of holies at Montmajour is the confessional of Saint Trophemus, a tiny chapel hewn out of the rock, its only approach, a series of terraced steps bordered by flowers blooming in wild profusion, steeping the air with their subtle fragrance. This spot, like the Aliscamps at Arles, was a pilgrims' shrine for centuries. Just beyond the giant fortress tower built as a defence by the Counts of Montma-

MONTMAJOUR AND LES BAUX 157

jour, and just outside the monastic enclosure, stands the miniature chapel of Saint Croix, a seeming survival of the Roman period. In perfect preservation, it is classic in its architecture even to the essentially Roman mode of dome lighting; but its history, or the reason for its being, is shrouded in mystery. As yet no one has been able to discover whether it was built for a mortuary chapel, a baptistry or a mausoleum. If it is of Roman origin, doubtless it served as a mausoleum, and, perchance, was the last resting place of some Roman warrior.

From Montmajour to Les Baux, the road winds through a rugged country, its hillsides covered with scraggy olive trees, its grey fields and pasture lands splashed with purple heather. To the north stretch the deep, blue hills of the Alpilles, where, perched upon an isolated crag, Les Baux clings like an eagle's nest to the lofty, ragged cliff, dominating the Val d'Enfer which Mistral claims inspired Dante's architectural descriptions in his *Inferno*. At Fontveille, a quaint little village, one passes the old mill made famous by Daudet in his "Letters from My Mill."

The beginnings of Les Baux go back to the times of the Troglodytes, who set the fashion of hewing their houses out of the rock, a notable

158 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

feature both in the town and in the château crowning the heights. Like Arles, Les Baux is built upon Roman foundations, the site of Les Baux being the camp of the Roman Marius; but unlike Arles, it is the mediæval past rather than the Roman that dominates this hill-town of Provence. Les Baux reminds one of a rich tapestry crowded with all the splendour and magnificence of mediæval pageantry, those days of René the troubadour, poet, king. Its name harks back to the days of the Visigoths, those grim conquerors from the East, the ancient House of Baux, none other than the descendants of the Baltes, of royal blood among the Visigoths, and the most ancient family of Provence.

In the twelfth century, the seigneurs of Les Baux, who styled themselves Kings of Arles and Counts of Provence, began to play a powerful part in Provençal history. Their power extended to Sardinia and the far-away kingdom of Naples, and many of them taking part in the Crusades, they finally even claimed the title of Emperors of Constantinople. When Les Baux came under the domination of Charles of Anjou in the thirteenth century, a golden era dawned, an era that reflected not only great deeds of arms, and the aggrandisement of power, but all the brilliance and

luxuriance, the wit and culture, the chivalry and gallantry that made Les Baux the international gathering place of troubadours, of kings, of fair ladies and great princes. Here the culture of Europe flocked to the famous "Cours d'Amour" of King René and his beautiful Queen Jeanne of Laval, the same Jeanne whose pavilion still stands amid the desolate waste of her once flower-scented garden; and here the gallant band of troubadours sang of the beauty of the princesses and the valour of the chevaliers. The most famous of these troubadours were Guilhem de Cabestan, Sordel, Pierre d'Auvergne, Roger d'Arles, and King René. Their verse dedicated to those Queens of Beauty, Cecile des Baux, called Passe Rose, Alix and Clairette des Baux, Jeanne de Laval and many others who graced that kingly court. Those "Cours d'Amour" were always presided over by a woman, and it was a woman who decided the contest, and who, with a "kiss of felicitation," set upon the victor's brow a crown of peacock's plumes.

To know that the peasants of Les Baux,—sturdy descendants of the Visigoths,—believe still in fairies, one has but to hear from their lips the legends that have come down to them through the centuries. The most ancient of these is one

160 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

they will tell you as you stand in the "Grottes des Fées," the tale of three sorcerers who held captive beneath the grotto a golden goat. To the one courageous and happy enough to rescue him, this goat will bring good fortune and unending prosperity. Another legend tradition has handed down, is that of a silver bell that for centuries has rested in the bottom of an old well of Les Baux, where it was hidden during a siege to save it from being pillaged.

The death of the beautiful Alix des Baux, the last of that heroic race of the Baltes, inspired the poetic imagination of a poet of those days. At the moment of her death, so the poem tells us, a great star flared across the sky, and descending by the old tower of Baux, entered the chamber where the princess lay dying. There it burned with an untold radiance until, as the princess breathed her last, it went out suddenly. This story calls to mind the finding by Mistral a few years ago in an ancient tomb in the church of Saint Vincent, the beautiful golden locks of one of the princesses of Les Baux, a princess of great beauty and charm, sung of by the troubadours, who died before she had grown to womanhood.

The latter history of Les Baux is linked with that of France, for in 1482 Provence and Les

MONTMAJOUR AND LES BAUX 161

Baux passed under the domination of Louis XI. of France. Its decline and complete destruction followed in 1633 when Louis XIII., acting upon the advice of Cardinal Richelieu, called this ancient stronghold of feudal independence to account; and the walls of the château, impregnable for seven centuries, were demolished. To-day the town is a deserted city of only one hundred and twenty inhabitants, its streets lined with rows of staring, roofless houses, some primitive, hewn out of the rock, some, even in their decay, revealing the beauty belonging to that period of Renaissance when the names of Porcelet and Manville were still a power. The left wall of the church of Saint Martial is rough-hewn out of the primitive rock, while the other two aisles are Romanesque and Gothic respectively. The church is massive, sombre, impressive, in keeping with its fantastic surroundings. In the chapel wall at the left of the choir is a beautiful tomb of a bygone Lady de Manville. The present Prince de Manville-Bianchi lives in his château near Les Baux, and is a liberal patron. Claude II. de Manville became a Huguenot, and by right of feudal jurisdiction over his lands, he was able to give protection to Huguenot refugees. Carved over the fine fifteenth century portal of the Hu-

162 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

guenot church one can still see the famous device of the Geneva Reformers,—*POST TENEBRAS LUX*.

Surely as Robiba has said, the princes of Les Baux took this mountain of Les Baux, cut it, fashioned it, hollowed it, until there rose upon those craggy heights a wonderful citadel, half cave, half palace, the most fantastic creation of architecture in the world, the most superb ruins of that great Middle Age, expressive too, of that strange mingling of barbaric splendour and culture which reached its zenith at this château of King René in this golden land of Provence. Mountain and fortress, cliff, towers and château form one giant framework, the summit crowned by the donjon, part rock, part masonry, from whence one gets a superb panoramic view of the surrounding country. To the southeast stretches the vast plain of la Crau, green, cultivated, dotted here and there with farms and villages; while far-off along the horizon line winds the Rhone, bordered by solemn ranks of cypresses. West from the banks of that mighty river lies the Camargue whose silvery sands are shifting ever under the sullen, changing flood of the Rhone Mort,—a deep undercurrent of life, mysterious, ceaseless,—the dead yet living past the dominant influence still in this land of myths,

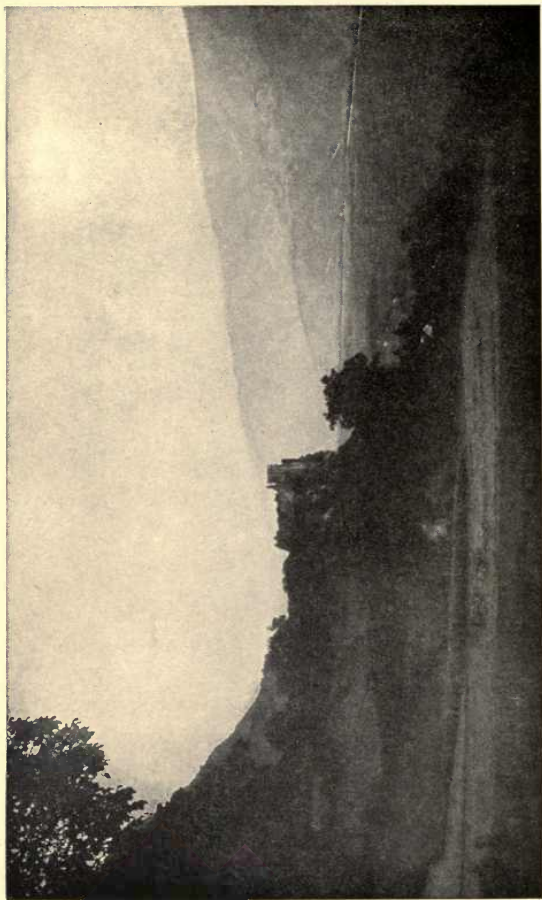
MONTMAJOUR AND LES BAUX 163

of pagan beauty, of Eastern luxuriance. Here upon the desolate wastes of the Camargue roam wild bulls, and the white ponies roving in herds are lineal descendants of the Saracen war horses left ranging here by their Saracen masters when in the eight century they fled before the conquering hosts of Charles Martel. To the south one catches a glimmer of the sparkling Mediterranean; to the north rise the barren hills of the Alpilles.

Standing upon those desolate heights of Les Baux to-day, the crumbling ruins of a mighty past all about, one can picture René of Anjou and Queen Jeanne holding their Courts of Love with regal magnificence. Here as the shadows lengthen in the golden silence of late afternoon, one catches again the sound of light laughter and of song rippling up from those once luxurious halls, so silent now, yet vibrant of the past which lives, a past dominating still even as the river that for centuries has wound its way down through the heart of France to the sea, that same river Rhone whose song has reverberated through all the ages:

“Le Rhone—c’est l’humanité qui passe.”





Château Miolans, St. Pierre-d'Aubigny

VII

A HILL-TOWN OF SAVOIE

MIOLANS

An eagle poised in flight
This Miolans. Its sunshot eyes
Seeking the hills.

IN the fertile valley of the Isère, encompassed by wooded hills and silent, snow-capped mountains, Miolans, poised upon a craggy promontory, commands a wonderful panoramic view of the valley and beyond to the Combe de Savoie, the Alps de Tarentaise, Marianne and Dauphiny that, rising range upon range, lose themselves in slow drifting clouds.

There are two approaches to Miolans, one from the Fréterive side, the second from Saint-Pierre-d'Aubigny, the hill-town over which it broods. From Saint-Pierre, a winding road skirts the vine-clad hill, a sudden bend revealing the château rising upon its pinnacle of rock, dominating Saint-

166 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

Pierre and the tiny hamlets of Bourget, Miolanet and Miolans, as it in turn is overshadowed by gaunt Fréterive.

The history of Miolans is divided into two periods, the feudal period, when it belonged to the powerful seigneurs de Miolans, and the period beginning after it was ceded with all its dependencies by Claudine de Miolans, the last of the direct line, to Charles, duc de Savoie. This second period dates from 1523, although it was not until 1559 that the château was transformed into a fortress and a State's prison. Very little is known of the feudal history of Miolans, save that from the mention of the names of Guifred and Nantelme, Sieurs de Miolans in the eleventh century, the seigneurs were powerful in the duchy, taking their part in secular matters pertaining to the state, as the ecclesiastics of their family held sway in religious matters.

Built upon a Roman camp, as proved by the Roman stonework in the foundations, and especially by a Roman arch of brick found in the tower of Saint Pierre, the oldest part of the château, Miolans maintains to-day its feudal primitiveness. Falling into decay after the revolution, Miolans has been partially restored by its present owner, who inhabits a portion of the

château, and who has preserved, not only its feudal character, but the atmosphere of that grim Middle Age when the fierce and mighty seigneurs swept down the valley to sack and pillage, or sat in their baronial hall administering justice.

About the gates of the château, the tiny hamlet of Miolans scrambles picturesquely along a rocky knole, its plastered houses fashioned with overhanging roofs and balconies, typical of the mountaineer's chalet. A natural cleft in the rock forms the outer moat, and to enter the château one must cross it by the old stone drawbridge, and so pass through the portcullised gateway defended by a bastion and a covered way. After passing through a second gateway guarded by casemates, one traverses a winding road between the ivy-grown walls and the keep, the road shaded now by feathery larches, and bordered by single and double hydrangeas, and leading to the third gateway that opens into the great courtyard. This gateway is guarded by a massive round tower in which numerous important acts took place. The tower marks the primitiveness of this feudalistic château, and its essentially warlike character. In the entertainment of the great nobles who, for example, gathered there in 1241 to conclude the Confederation of Fiefs, the baron de Miolans re-

168 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

ceived and entertained them, not in a special hall of state, but in the great hall of the château that was salon, dining hall and sleeping apartment in one. There were two reasons for this. In the châteaux of those rude days, as in the fortified towns, space was limited, and comfort was sacrificed for strength. Then there was the chance that these noble neighbours might prove enemies, and if so, it was well for them not to penetrate beyond the main courtyard, and so learn the secret strength lying behind those mask-like walls. Across the courtyard, close to the rampart on the valley side, stands the château chapel of Saint Étienne, the former sanctuary of a number of relics, among them three thorns from Christ's crown of thorns, brought from Palestine by Jacques de Miolans at the end of the fourteenth century. An ancient tomb rests in the chapel, but the chapel—for a long time the church of the hamlet also—was restored in the fifteenth century, and again of late years by Doctor Guiter, the present owner. On the façade are the arms of Miolans quartered with those of Montmayeur.

When Claudine de Miolans ceded Miolans and its dependencies to the duc de Savoie in 1523, these relics—the Holy Thorns—were transferred to the Augustinian church of Saint-Pierre-d'Au-

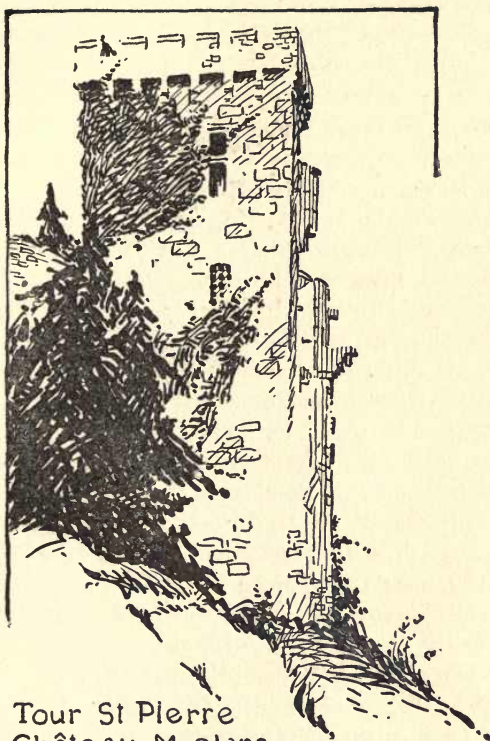
bigny, a monastery founded in 1381. In 1636, a guard of honour of Saintes Épines was organised, an outgrowth really of a former guard of honour founded in the fifteenth century by one of the seigneurs de Miolans, who set aside for their exclusive use a meadow, the "Pré de Miolans." Every Passion Sunday, the fête of the Saintes Épines is celebrated with great solemnity in the church at Saint Pierre. Thus the picturesque hill-town, clinging to the precipitous sides of the Col du Frêne, still looks toward Miolans, protector in former days of its relics and of its people.

The donjon and the outlying towers stand on a perpendicular rock in the centre of the enclosure. This keep was the last retreat, and was connected with the rest of the château by a drawbridge of which only the ivy-grown piers remain. This bridge spanned a rock-hewn moat that was guarded on its outer side by battlemented walls. Through the archway of the keep, with its portcullis still hanging in place, one looks into a garden bright with flowers, the sunflowers, chrysanthemums and hollyhocks interspersed with fruit trees—figs among them—a note of the South touched out here in sight of snow-capped peaks. On the outer edge of the garden rises the stalwart flanking tower of Saint Pierre, from which one

170 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

gets a superb view of Mont Blanc, white and glistening and half-veiled in clouds, the valley crowned by the beauty of those shimmering heights. Another bit reminiscent of the South, was the machicolation on this Tour Saint Pierre, which was similar to that at Avignon and in Provence, excepting that it possessed squared ends instead of rounded. The donjon also had squared corners, terminating in small turreted towers, unlike the usual unbroken surface of feudal keeps. The keep consisted of four tiers: on one side of the archway were the kitchens with their wide-mouthed fireplaces and ovens, the guard room, the castle well; on the other side were the prisons, the Inferno, Purgatory and Trésor. Above the prisons were the Governor's apartments, comfortable only in comparison with the Inferno, which was as dark, dank and chill as Dante's conception of the lower regions. In one of its cachots Yolant de Miolans was walled up.

Standing beside this ivy-clad keep, enveloped by the quiet hum of midsummer, its archway echoing the twittering joyousness of birds, it is hard to realise that for three centuries Miolans was called the "bastile of the ducs de Savoie." The horrors perpetrated here during the feudal régime of the seigneurs de Miolans are, happily,



Tour St Pierre
Château Miolans

172 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

perhaps, age-dimmed memories. But to this later period when Miolans became a fortress and a state's prison, the archives of the duchy give access. Blood-stained pages they are, including the names of the great more often than the lowly, each page marked with inhuman cruelties and injustice in an age of the *lettre de cachet*. Miolans, we are told, was "destined essentially to imprison troublesome personalities" who, having passed beneath the portcullis, were conveniently forgotten. Of all the governors, the name of Pierre le Blanc seems to stand out most prominently, a synonym for ferocity and barbarity. The Jesuit Père Monod, councillor of the Queen Regent, was prisoner here in 1640, leaving behind him, when he obtained his freedom, some valuable manuscripts and several solar watches which he had made for his royal mistress. Another prisoner of note was Vincent Lavini, a clerk in the *Bureaux du Ministère*, and a tool of a Count Stortiglione. Arrested for making counterfeit bank notes for the Count, Lavini paid the penalty of the Count's villainy. Lavini spent twenty-one years at Miolans, occupying himself with copying engravings, portraits of the pope, the king, Titian, Richelieu and other men of note. Under the governorship of Launay, several prisoners made

their escape, the most famous being the marquis de Sade, a black sheep of a good family, to whom the husband of Laura, the beloved of Petrarch, belonged. In love with the youngest daughter of the house of Montreuil, the marquis was forced into a marriage with the eldest, this marriage giving him pretext to plunge himself into the life of a debauchee. Crowning these episodes by flight into Italy with his early love, he was arrested and imprisoned at Miolans. Chance threw him into the company of another reprobate, the baron de Songy, and together they walked in the court of the lower fort, dined together, and oftentimes gambled away the night. Owing to the relaxation of discipline at that time, the two dined and played in the room of Lieutenant Duclos, where they were quick to note that the window was without bars. One night, the governor being absent, they made bold to invade the governor's apartment, where they armed themselves with swords and pistols. Then, still unmolested, they let themselves down from Duclos' window by means of a rope, and, assisted by Violon, de Sade's valet, who was awaiting them, they made good their escape. Both men were subsequently recaptured. De Songy was brought back to Miolans; but de Sade was sent to Paris, where, dur-

174 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

ing Napoleon's reign, he died of his excesses.

In the Tour Saint Pierre, on which is embossed the arms of Miolans, there were three tiers of prisons also, more solitary and terrible, doubtless, than that of the Inferno. The subterranean Chemin de Ronde, connecting the keep with the main château, and the oubliettes are of special interest because of their perfect preservation.

In the ghostly silence of a winter's night, when the mountains and the valley lie deep in snow, when the avalanches come crashing down the mountain side, and when the wind cries fiercely through the ice-bound trees, one might catch again the shrieks of the prisoners, the oaths, the moans, the ribald laughter that have echoed within those grim, grey walls. But in the deepening glow of the midsummer sunset hour, the mountains half-veiled in mist that has caught the prismic beauty of a rainbow, one hears only the rippling laughter of the evening breeze, the twitter of homing birds, the low bleating of sheep upon the hill-side. In this brooding peace the ghastly horrors enacted here are blurred and softened. Romance casts its mystic spell. Miolans is guardian rather than oppressor of the hamlets gathered about its gates, Miolans, the eagle poised in flight, its sun-shot eyes forever seeking the hills.

VIII

A HILL-TOWN OF AUVERGNE

LE PUY

LIKE Rocamadour, Le Puy is an ancient shrine about which a city has grown up, and in point of antiquity Le Puy is almost as old. Of beauty and picturesqueness there is little to choose between the two; yet they are very different. Rocamadour, clinging to the sheer sides of the barren, desolate gorge of the Alzou, is possessed of a solitary grandeur. Le Puy, crowning Mont d'Anis, dominates in majestic loveliness the fair valley of the Borne, a fertile valley bordered with the snow-capped peaks of the Cevennes that stretch away to the south and east to be finally lost in the haze-rimmed distance. As at far-away Rocamadour and Mont-Saint-Michel, the citadel at Le Puy was built to defend a shrine, and its crumbling walls are still part of the cathedral precincts. Along the narrow streets that open now and again into a Place that on market

176 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

days is crowded with picturesque costumes, one sees women with exquisite lace caps sitting before their doors making the lace that has made famous the lace-makers of Auvergne. This jumble of winding streets leads to the city's very heart, its cathedral, the stalwart guardian of a century worn shrine.

Although this cathedral, an exotic of the far East, dates from the end of the sixth century, its foundation was laid in the traditions of the first when the Mont d'Anis was set apart at the command of the Blessed Virgin to be a shrine, a holy spot upon whose jagged crest was to rise one of the noblest cathedrals of France. The first message came in the early days when Saint Georges and Saint Front had come from Rome, missionaries sent by Saint Peter to this little Roman town of Podium set about by hills. A good woman ill of the fever, was taken at the bidding of the Blessed Virgin to Mont d'Anis and laid upon an ancient druidical dolmen, where, according to the ancient chronicle, she was miraculously cured, and where appeared to her a legion of angels. The next day Saint Georges, accompanied by his followers, repaired to the mountain top, which, although it was July, they found covered with snow. Before the eyes of the multi-

tude a stag leaped out of the thicket, tracing the outline of a church. The following day the snow had disappeared, but a hedge of hawthorn had sprung up and bloomed, marking the ground-plan of the church to be. This spot set apart and held sacred from earliest times, was not actually built upon until the sixth century under Saint Vosy, a successor of Saint Georges. A second message from the Blessed Virgin similiar to the first came before the building was begun by a young architect, a Roman senator named Scrutaire. Built in the Gallo-Roman style, this basilica was built of black and white stone peculiar to Auvergne, and suggestive of northern Italy and Byzantine influence, as is the stateliness of that rock-bound temple that is always "watching to God." It is possessed of all the solemnity and mystery of the East, reminding one of the oriental rock-temples dwelling in the very heart of the mountains. Especially is this true of its arched entrance where innumerable steps lead from the Place straight up to the altar,—a pilgrims' way leading them into the very presence of their God. Even the richness of the lavishly carved capitals and the lightness and charm of the Romanesque arches bespeak the East. The sculptures as well as the architecture are Byzantine in character, revealing

178 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

not only the influence of the crusaders, who returning from the Holy Land brought with them Eastern ideas, but also marking the indelible impress left by Saracen and Hun who in the early days swept like a tidal wave across the snow-tipped mountain barriers into France.

The façade, divided into three great bays corresponding to the three great naves of the basilica, is very imposing. The portico also divided into three parts by gigantic pillars flanked by Byzantine columns that support the ancient roof, is to quote an ancient poet, "A hymn conceived for the glory of the Virgin of Anis." Upon the keystone of the arch is carved a figure of the Virgin Mother. Carved deep upon the first steps leading up into the sanctuary is the watch-word of this pilgrims' shrine.

"Si vous n'évitez pas le péché, évitez de toucher a seuil
Car la reine du ciel veut un culte sans tache."

To the right and left of the porch, in the atrium, are two tiny chapels, one a baptistry consecrated to Saint Gilles, the other to Saint Étienne and used as a mortuary chapel. Both are ornamented with paintings wonderfully preserved, and the great cedar doors guarding the entrance are notable examples of the best Byzantine sculpture,

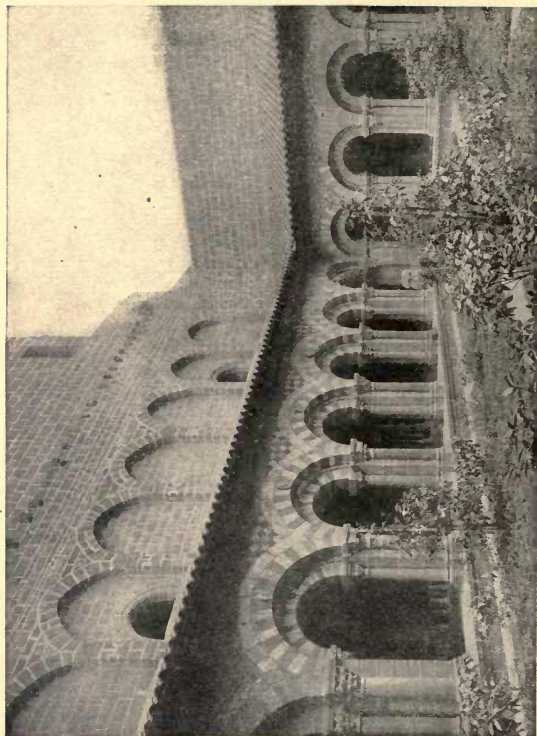
the rich ornamentation recalling Indian and Persian inlaid work and bas-reliefs. The walls and the arched roof of the porch are covered with frescoes. A few steps higher up once stood the Door of Gold between two columns of red oriental porphyry. It was adorned with massive knockers of engraved bronze. Here in the old days the Chapter came to attend the bishop at his solemn entrance to the cathedral's holy of holies; here with bare feet, on their knees, carrying a lighted candle in their hands, came rude men-at-arms, and fierce, proud nobles, the terror of the mountains, to make honourable amends for their misdeeds; and here on festal days pilgrims passed the night in prayer. To-day the doorway is blocked, the great archway holding enshrined the revered statue of the Black Virgin, a replica of the first statue, "guardian of Le Puy," destroyed during the Revolution, that was bestowed by Saint Louis on his return from the Holy Land as a thank-offering for his release from captivity. Tradition has ascribed the original statue as Egyptian, a figure of the goddess Isis some say; others that it was carved by Jeremiah in Egypt as a symbol of the truth he had prophesied.

Like all churches and cathedrals, Le Puy as we see it to-day, is the result of a gradual evo-

180 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

lution, and its history is marked by three distinctive periods. Its first period of construction dates from the time of Saint Vosy and Saint Scrutaire to the ninth century when the choir was enlarged by two side naves with a square end and a transept with circular chapels. This square end suggests Cistercian influence. The vaulting was low and the central dome was open. The church thus made a Greek cross. This "Belfry of the Angels" is of interest not only because of the wide band of exquisite carving bordering it, but also because one sees the free use of the trompe arch, the forerunner of the pendentive that in a later period superceded the clumsier form of the trompe arch altogether. The second period dates from the ninth to the eleventh century when the church was enlarged by two bays, the vaulting of the nave and the transepts heightened, and the shape of the central dome modified by the construction of a higher octagon. In the third period, which includes the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, two more bays were added; the porch, the façade and the picturesque staircase were built, giving added stateliness and grandeur to this exotic of the East, Notre Dame of Le Puy.

The greatest glory of Le Puy is the Romanesque cloisters which rank among the most beau-



Cathedral Cloisters at Le Puy

tiful in France. They date from the ninth century, the north side being the most ancient portion. The south gallery surpasses the others in the richness of capitals, in the diversity and finish of the subjects, and in the arabesques that adorn the Byzantine cornice. In these carvings one sees all the lavish beauty of design touched with the fantastic so characteristically Eastern. Along the cornice there are a series of flowers and foliage interspersed with the heads of men and animals,—a monk and a knight rescuing an abbatial cross; a fox quarrelling with a bird; a dog biting off the tail of a demon; an angel saving a child from two demons. In the chapter house is an old painting representing Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric and Music. In the centre of the cloister garth stands the old well; while towering far above the quiet cloister rise the massive walls of the cathedral and the Tour Saint-Maieul, the ancient fortress, walls unadorned save for the black and white stone and patches of mosaic work, red, black and white peculiar to Auvergne; walls well fortified against the fierce lords of Polignac; walls of silence that let no murmur of the outside world creep in to break the stillness. In this great fortress tower one sees a jumble of broken ornament and stone,—Roman, Romanesque and

182 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

Renaissance. The thirteenth century belfry, one of the rare Transitional bell-towers extant, is very fine with a curiously sculptured figure of the builder upon it. The *Porte du For* opening on the *Place du For*,—the site of the Roman Forum,—is a curious as well as a very beautiful bit of architecture of twelfth century Byzantine, each side presenting a rounded arch connected with the others only at three points. Under the campanile one finds some fourth century Gallo-Roman sculptures and a frieze that once adorned a Roman house at Nîmes. The baptistry of Saint Jean, dating from the fourth century, stands apart from the cathedral, as does the ancient episcopal palace that to-day stands empty, its massive walls crumbling to decay.

Among the throng of pilgrims who for centuries have worshipped at the shrine of Our Lady of Anis, the most illustrious were the Emperor Charlemagne, whose munificence made Le Puy a power among the bishoprics of France; Saint Louis, whose gift of the Black Virgin made this shrine the most holy spot in France; Charles VII., who, standing at the foot of the sanctuary, saw for the first time the royal banner of France unfurled to the cries of the populace: “Vive notre

roi Charles VII. !"; Francis I., who confirmed all the privileges of the city, the bishopric and the chapter, and who on his return to Paris presented the cathedral with two silver sanctuary lamps with the command that they be hung before the statue of the Black Virgin.

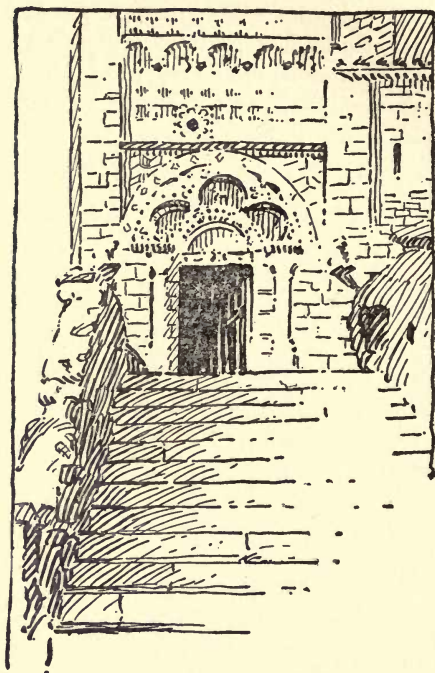
Some quarter of a mile distant, upon a jut of basalt rock, stands the picturesque chapel of Saint-Michel-Aiguilhe.

It dates from the tenth century, and is a remarkably fine example of early Romanesque, especially the façade and the portal which is carved with curious bas-reliefs, Bysantine in character. The interior is oval in shape, with a double row of pillars enclosing the central nave.

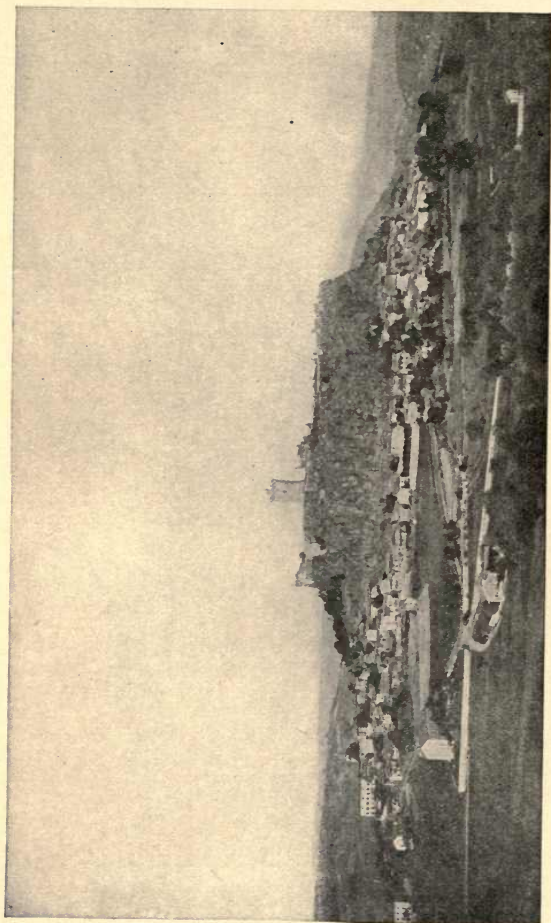


Distant View of
St.-Michel-Aiguilhe.

Far off across the valley of the Borne, upon another mass of basalt rock stands Polignac, the stronghold in the rude days of Middle Age of those fierce lords of Polignac, who were the menace always of the cathedral city of Mont d'Anis,



Doorway, St.-Michel-Aiguilhe.



Polignac, near Le Puy

and whose ruthless pillaging brought terror to the pilgrim worshippers. It is a wonderful old château, built partly upon the ruins of an ancient Roman temple dedicated to Apollo, its portcullis tower protected by natural rock defences and a round tower. The approach is long and winding even after one reaches the little grey town with its magnificent Romanesque church, a narrow way flanked by frowning walls and massive towers. The superb square keep has been restored of late, and in it is preserved the giant mask of Apollo,—a bearded Apollo with blue eyes,—that once rested upon the top of the stone altar of the temple, near the well from whence issued the voice of the oracle. Here in ancient days there dwelt a famous oracle, and here the Emperor Claudius came in state from Lyons to consult the oracle of this pagan shrine.

The kitchens and the dining hall with fine old windows, the living apartments with the remnants of a mediæval fireplace, the scanty remains of the chapel about which cluster stone coffins, shaped for the head, and a few crumbling walls are all that remain now of a stronghold that once flung defiance to the world.

Standing there by the crumbling parapet, and looking off across the fertile valley, once the crater

186 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

of a volcano, one sees Le Puy rising gleaming white against the horizon rimmed by the jagged peaks of the snow-capped Cevennes. Two shrines, one pagan, one Christian, bear witness to the peace of the valley of the Borne set about by hills, a peace that has survived the struggle and the stress of centuries. The power and glory of imperial Rome has vanished; the magnificence of royal France is but an illumined page of history; the gaily-apparelled throngs of pilgrims have given place to those of humble mien: but about Le Puy,—the holiest spot in France,—there broods not only the spirit of the France of yesterday, but the spirit of the France of to-day. High above the cathedral upon the Rocher Corneille, a throne of volcanic rock, stands the giant statue of Our Lady of France, symbol truly of that democracy which is the very soul of France to-day. Le Puy standing in the fair valley of the Borne is a place of wonderful architectural feats, its picturesqueness unrivalled, its chapel-crowned spikes of basalt rock unique. It is a city of dreams whose winding streets are but a pilgrims' way leading upward to the heights, its heart the cathedral of Eastern beauty, stateliness and mystery that as throughout the ages guards still a century-worn shrine.

IX

A HILL-TOWN OF PICARDIE

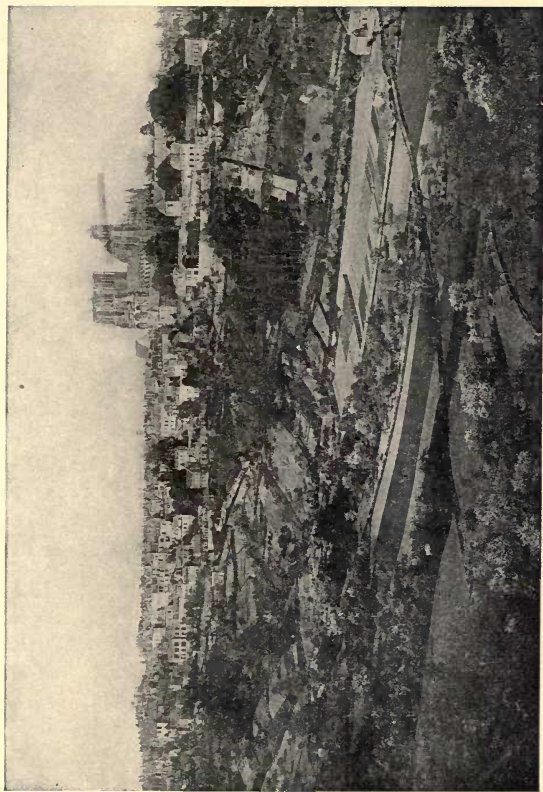
LAON

PERHAPS of all the cathedrals of France, Laon is most truly the centre of the people's life; for it was the meeting place for social and civil as well as for religious ends; a general meeting place and not merely a hallowed spot in which to pray. Laon conserves its democratic origin; its keynote is democracy,—ideal of France to-day,—and it represents the first awakening of nationalism, the first conception of national unity such as one sees at Chinon, at Uzerche and some of the Norman strongholds. Like its sister Mont-Saint-Michel, it is rude and strong, the monument of a people daring, energetic and full of masculine, of warlike grandeur; but at Mont-Saint-Michel the feudal spirit reigns, whereas at Laon, a hill-town of the communal type, democracy since earliest times was at grips with feudalism, its people ready to attack this

188 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

dragon of the Middle Ages whenever it raised its head to strike at their rights which they held dearer than life itself. At Laon, all through its history, we see an almost continuous death struggle between the people and their seigneur the bishop, between democracy and feudal autocracy, democracy in the end throttling feudalism forever and planting the seed of internationalism, which in its flowering was to make for unity, patriotism, the glorious oneness of the France of to-day.

In position, Laon is reminiscent of both Mont-Saint-Michel and of Le Puy, for the rock on which it stands rises abruptly out of the plain, an isolated rock standing in the midst of wind-swept grain fields that stretch out like a great inland sea to lose themselves in the horizon line. The gold-grey town covers the entire top of the long narrow plateau, that on the western end curves suddenly to the south, thus forming a harbour-like valley called the Cuve de Saint Vincent, a picturesque spot partly covered with gardens and vineyards and partly wooded. Suggestive too of Italy, this tree-girt town both in its approach by the white winding road and the steep flight of steps, and in its domination of the crest of the hill; for no houses straggle up the precip-



General View of Laon

itous sides,—a characteristic of French hill-towns. In its heart dwells the “glory of the mountain,” its cathedral of Notre Dame, that because of its position possesses more dignity than Chartres, its impressiveness centred in the grey cluster of weather-beaten towers; for this cathedral, as Viollet-le-Duc says, was built by a race of giants, and belongs to the age of the great Gothic cathedrals, the age of Amiens, Chartres and Rheims. Yet it is distinctly individual, reflecting the temper and the spirit of the men who created it. It possesses none of that religious fervour permeating the other three; the mystic spirit enveloping Le Puy is foreign to it. It is expressive rather of the rude savagery, the warlike energy of the Normans coupled with their robust faith, a faith that expressed itself in deeds rather than contemplation, in that close union of God and man as revealed in the mingling of their religious and civil life, in their celebration within the cathedral walls of the Feast of the Innocents and the Feast of Fools,—the militant spirit of Mont-Saint-Michel expressing itself at Laon in the cause of democracy. These good people of Laon, no less than the people of Le Puy, worshipped an ideal and fought for it, an ideal that of a truth is the very heart and soul of religion itself, a democracy that

190 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

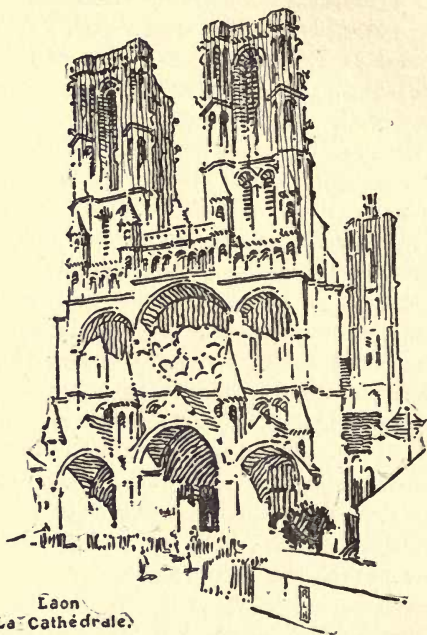
in the Middle Ages was in reality a more dominant note than feudalism.

Laon saw the passing of the Gauls, the Romans and the Franks, its grey walls already scarred and stained when Brunhilda died within the shadow of its hill. In the third century, Saint B  at came from Italy bringing Christianity to this hill-town of the north; and not long after Saint Preuve came thither from far away Scotland. So the first chapel was built, which, growing too small, was replaced by a larger church, until in the eleventh century, Laon rising to the dignity of a bishopric, the cathedral was begun soon after that memorable year of 1112 that saw the first establishment of the commune. Thus from the laying of its foundation-stone, the cathedral was built in the spirit of the commune, as the cathedral was the centre of the people's life, breathing the ideals of democracy, each stone an embodiment of the temper of those who lifted in their midst a lasting monument to their ideals. Laon in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was rich, populous and turbulent, and was one of the first to establish a communal form of government which was modelled partly after Noyon and partly after St. Quentin. In 1191, they obtained from Philip Augustus a confirmation of the charter that had

been already granted them by Louis le Gros to whom they had agreed to pay a yearly tribute in exchange for their rights. This original charter which was forced upon their bishop, Gaudri, a Norman by birth and a referendary of Henry I. of England, was obtained following events that occurred during the bishop's temporary absence in England, and after his return,—a sudden uprising of the people occasioned by oppression, and a desire to obtain their freedom at all costs even to the murder of their seigneur and bishop. The sign and symbol of this new-found liberty was twofold, the cathedral they were to build, and the great communal tower standing in the heart of the town, the Tour de Beffroi that summoned the citizens not only in time of danger but to pass judgment. As Thierry says, it could be seen from afar, expressive of their power. It was during the ensuing years of peace that the people began the building of their cathedral, the home of their secular as well as their spiritual life. Chief among the characteristics essentially peculiar to Laon, is the long choir with its square apse which is strangely in harmony with the simple directness and rude strength of its builders. Though this square apsidal east end points to English influence, Laon having been under their domination

192 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

for a time, yet it is probably really due to Cistercian influence that was the cause of this style of



building in England,—an influence that in architecture as well as in religion strove to bring back the old ascetic ideals of early monasticism, the

restraint and simplicity of line of the early Norman builders. The high inner porch and the approach to the north transept are both distinctive of Laon. The interior which is very beautiful, was once as rich and glowing as Saint Marks in Venice. Now, despite the fine stained glass windows through which the southern sun pours its coloured gold, it is cold and barren, devoid of the fervid glow of mysticism enveloping Chartres and Le Puy; yet the grace of the triforium, the lofty span of its arches, its superb choir gates, its row of nave chapels enclosed in exquisitely carved screens, hold one by the sheer force of the "warlike masculine energy" expressed by a beauty and simplicity of line and form that is truly God-like. Miracles this great church has known as well as Chartres and Le Puy, as it has known and received saintly bishops, among them Saint Remi, as well as those who held their seigneurial power above their ecclesiastical; and in the old fifteenth century inventory one finds record of penitents and of women possessed of devils coming to this glorious cathedral to be exorcised. With this race of giants dwelling on their hill-top, one finds many seeming inconsistencies. Turbulent and full of warlike energy they are, and quick to do battle for their rights even to murder; yet this little grey



Laon La Cathédrale. Interior.

town was so full of churches that it was called the "Ville Sainte" in the old days; the two reconciled by the mutual ideal lying at the heart of both, democracy, the close union of the material and the spiritual, the keynote, in short, of the eleventh century.

The fourteenth century façade is a masterpiece of pure Gothic, its sculptured figures of the perfection of Rheims and Amiens, each figure of individual perfection and belonging to the floodtide of Gothic art in France, a period when every mason was an artist who attained the highest because of the spirit in which he worked; a period in French Gothic sculpture which Mr. Cram holds equal to the best work of Greece.

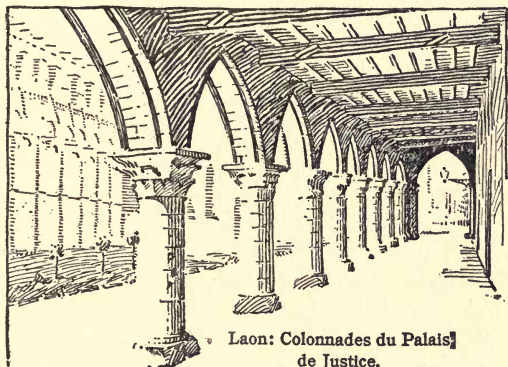
There is a suggestion of Spain in the celebration of the Feast of Fools, reminiscent of the dancing boys of Seville who at Corpus Christi and at the Feast of the Immaculate Conception dance before the altar in the cathedral. These farces were abolished at Laon in 1560; but the memory of them was conserved by a custom observed until the last century, that of distributing to those assisting at the Mass on Epiphany crowns of green leaves. In the fifteenth century, many mystery plays were presented in the great nave of the cathedral, in which the monks took part not

196 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

disdaining to be counted among the actors. In 1462 at Witsuntide the Passion of Christ was given, covering a period of five days; and in August 1476 the mystery play entitled "Les Jeux de la Vie de Monseigneur Saint Denis" was presented, revealing truly the perfect faith and naïveté of these people of turbulent Laon. That they loved their cathedral passionately is shown by the way they guarded it from the scorching flame of revolution that swept France in 1793, the flame kindled so many centuries before at Laon, consuming the hearts of the nation that was to rise purified and cleansed from the ashes of the old. In sympathy with the Revolution, and transforming their cathedral for a time into a Temple of Reason, they yet guarded it sacredly from the ruthless hand of a frenzied mob. Of the vast treasure belonging to the cathedral, little was left at the time of the Revolution; for the inroads made by Francis I. and Louis XIV. were princely, both monarchs having found this an easy way to replenish their empty coffers.

The thirteenth century episcopal palace is now the Palais de Justice, but one can still slip into the quiet green of the bishop's garden where the remnant of an exquisite old cloister remains. The glory of Laon is its gold-grey towers of which

one gets a peep from the cloister garth, towers from which the patient oxen look down as they have for centuries, from the open arches and windows upon the town and the plain from whence they hauled the colossal stones for the building of the cathedral,—touching memorial of a grate-



Laon: Colonnades du Palais
de Justice.

ful people. Yet here again one sees the temper of these people. At Chartres the people aflame with pious enthusiasm in the rearing of their cathedral, dragged the stones from the valley with their own hands. Not so Laon. They too built to the glory of God; but these men expended their energy in keeping their bishops in order and themselves free, leaving the oxen to have their proper

198 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

share in the building of this lasting monument to democracy, the common meeting place for communal gatherings and for prayer. The building up of the commune and the protection of their rights absorbed them far more than cathedral building. They were no less builders than their Norman neighbours, but their vision carried them beyond mere wood and stone.

These towers of Laon with their oxen, so stately in their simplicity, so rude and strong yet giving an effect of lightness and airiness, are unequalled according to a thirteenth century architect and traveller, one Villard de Honnecourt of Cambrai; and seeing them, one is ready to believe him. No matter where one sees them, from the end of one of the lane-like streets, or close by from a corner of the bishop's garden, or from the ramparts, they are forever regrouping their gold-grey beauty against the sky. There is a well-shaded walk about the town possessed of much variety, and from which one can get lovely and varied views of the town, the cathedral and the wide-reaching plain. In places the walk is terraced; again it opens into a formal grove where on feast days and in fair-time the people dance beneath the stars. In one spot it passes the ancient Porte d'Ardon; at another the Porte des

Chenizelles, or perchance a remnant of the hoary old town wall; while at one place the path slips through a deep, sun-flecked wood full of primeval beauty.

The transitional church of Saint Martin at the western end of the plateau is of interest because one of its ancient tombs recalls the great name



Laon. L'Eglise St Martin.

of de Coucy; for in the treacherous Thomas de Marle, a son of d'Enguerrand de Coucy, the bourgeois thought they had found a champion in their fight for liberty. To their sorrow they discovered that his interest in their cause was but his personal hatred of the king, Louis-le-Gros, and in the end he abandoned them to the mercy of the king. The ancient abbey of Saint Vincent, now occupied by military engineers, figured in the constant wars between bourgeois and bishop, proving a

200 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

sanctuary to the townspeople in their hour of need. From here one gets an imposing view of the cathedral across the Cuve de Saint Vincent.

Standing upon the ramparts and looking out across the plain, it is not difficult to picture the warrior bishops of Laon returning from their expeditions of pillage or of factional warfare with their neighbours of Coucy, of Cr  cy, of Pierrefonds, and revelling in the beauty of their cathedral rising proudly from its rocky eminence, its lofty towers the glory of Laon as Laon is the "glory of the mountain." Laon is bearing witness even in its present hour of German occupation, though riddled and torn by shell-fire, to the democracy that gave it birth, to those first stirrings of nationalism that to-day are the very bedrock of that great nation. Laon, rude and strong, is the monument of a people not only daring, energetic and full of "masculine warlike energy," but of a people who worshipped and bled for an ideal that lies at the very heart of religion itself,—democracy, an ideal that is the life-blood of the France of to-day.

X

A HILL-TOWN OF LA BEAUCE

CHARTRES

ONE of the chief fascinations of history is tracing the connecting link binding one period with another, one age with a succeeding one,—this link the visible point marking the footsteps of evolution; and every age is but the prototype of that which lies close-folded in the future. So at Chartres: we wander through its steep, century-worn streets, overshadowed by the timbered houses of the past, all quiet now and dormant, like the inmates,—rest following on the heels of the Herculean labours of a former generation that raised that mighty, grand cathedral in their midst in honour of Our Lady. Yet in the sleepy drone of midday, we can hear the pulsing reflex of that throbbing impetus of Middle Age, the far-off echo even of the chant of Druid and of prophecy now so visibly fulfilled; and in the worship of this temple, whose power predomi-

202 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

nates still, we see again the evolution that has been wrought in the crude worship of the Druids, with its half truths and its insight into what in later days became reality. While, in its dedication, seems to lie the keynote of its being and its primary devotion,—dedicated and set apart under the especial care of “Our Lady Under the Earth,” of her whose divine destiny was foretold by a voice speaking out of the cloud of a druidical sacrifice a century before the dawn broke over the night of a pagan world.

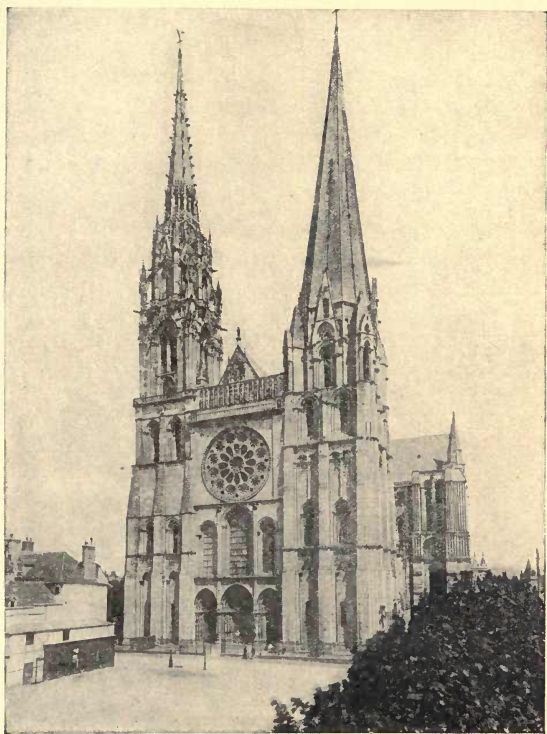
In those rude horizon days, a grove of oaks overlooked in silent solemnity the fertile land of La Beauce, and here at certain seasons the ruling tribe of Carnutes, headed by their king, one Pri-cus, assembled while the Druids, vested in their mantles of white wool, performed their accustomed ceremonies for gathering in the mistletoe which, coming down from Heaven, attached itself to oaks and divers other trees,—a figure of the Crucified Messiah,—symbol and token of the Gift that was to come. “For, as the Archdruid made sacrifice of bread and wine,” so says the ancient chronicle, “according to his custom, praying the God of Heaven that the sacrifice might be salutary to all the people of Carnutes, the Divine in-breathing so overpowered him as to well-nigh

strike him speechless. The voice was as of an angel's speaking from out the cloud, filling the old priest's heart with joy as he did hear the promise of fulfilment, that in one hundred years She would come who would restore the Golden Age in bringing forth Him for Whom all nations waited." So believing, they raised an altar in her honour, there within the grove, placing upon it an image of this "Virgini Purituræ," who, through her Son, would bring redemption to a weary, satiate world.

When to this fair land St. Potentian and his missionaries came, fulfilment having been accomplished, they found the people clinging still to their old belief, not worshipping the deities brought thither by their Roman conquerors,—the image of the Virgin and her Child remaining still within the sacred grove, guarded by the few Druids who were left, and who had been given sovereignty of the city by the good King Pricus before the Roman conquest. The people received with joy the preaching of the missionaries; their faith in things to come being thus made whole, they were baptised, the statue purified with holy water and with priestly blessing; the sanctuary consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, so eminently fitting. Here the See of Chartres was founded

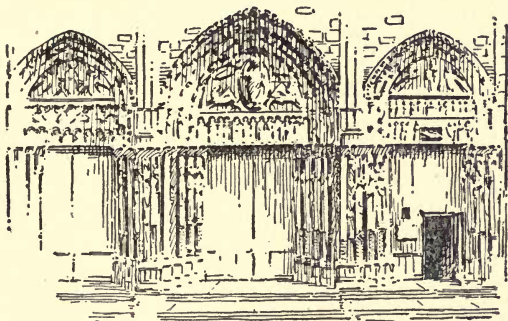
with St. Aventine as bishop, and after Constantine's conversion the first basilica was built, enshrining the sacred grotto, giving it sanctuary from the rude world outside, the crypt to alone survive the fire of warlike centuries. From the smouldering ashes of a Norse invasion the cathedral was rebuilt on its present scale in 1120, and with such enthusiasm that men, and women too, yoked themselves to carts to drag materials for its building. As we see it to-day in all its grandeur and proud loftiness of mien, it is the Gothic of the thirteenth century that triumphs, the earlier style marked only by the ancient crypt, the West Front, and the old spire, these three escaping from the ruthless fire of 1194 that crumbled the half-finished edifice to dust and ashes,—the dread fire-spirit pursuant enemy of all its days, yet quenching not the more sweeping enthusiastic fire that in the end conquered,—all conquering prevailed.

Its walls and towers are built with blocks Titan-hewn, a monstrous conception simply wrought, investing it with a peculiar dignity; austere it is, yet marvellously beautiful. Its great West Front is pierced by three deep arched doorways, lavishly set with statues boldly carved and of giant size, yet withal stiff and Byzantine in type, touched by the East from whence the prophecy



Exterior of Chartres Cathedral

had hailed and the fulfilment also. Prophets, elders of the Apocalypse and Biblical characters surround the Christ, the central figure of them all. Above, there are three pointed windows surmounted by a rose, crowned in its turn by an



Cathedral Doors, Chartres.

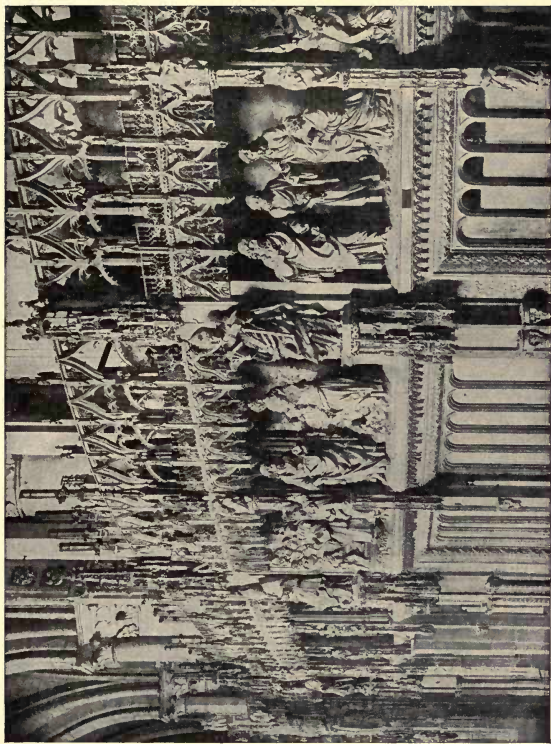
arcade of sixteenth century statues, and just above the gable is a figure of the Virgin standing between two angels; while on its apex rises a figure of the Saviour; the rest of that vast acreage of stone is barren and bare of carving and of ornament. The cathedral portals, north and south, are more elaborate and of later date, a fretwork of the sculptor's fantasie, wonderfully cut and chiselled, the portals peopled not with graven images alone,

206 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

but pulsing also with the life pressed deep by their creators' hands and skilful tooling. The porches that precede them, of later date still, give a depth and nobleness withal, an approach recessed, thus veiling the jeweled mysteries within by long, dim shadowy perspectus.

Chartres, however, tells not its story writ in stone as Amiens, though much is graven thus nor can be equalled,—as in these portals and the great choir wall within,—the life and passion of the Christ cut with cameo finesse yet strongly, “point lace in stone”; His whole life crowded thus about the altar of His temple, and wrought by the same hand, Jean Texier, who planned the tessellated spire, outsoaring in its delicate beauty and impressiveness even Antwerp and Strassburg.

As we step from out the hot glare of noonday and stand in the cool, shadowy depths of the nave, we feel amid the rich dimness of its lighting the touch of the Orient again,—a Byzantine luxuriance of colouring far different from the open cheerfulness of Amiens. A sense of mystery creeps over you, and bit by bit you catch the glow of all that jeweled prismic mass of coloured light filtering through the windowed walls of Orient-hued glass until the shimmering dust itself is stirred and vibrant in the soft translucent mellowness.



Chartres Cathedral: Sixteenth Century Carvings on the Choir Wall

The trefoil, emblem of the Trinity, is interwoven in the design of the cathedral, its elevations divided into three, the arcades springing from the ground the first; the triforium reached in the second; the third containing the clerestory, its mulioned windows of unusual slenderness, surmounted each one by a rose. The lower walls are pierced by simple lancets. Thus in effect, the highest peak is flushed with colour rich and radiant as is the worn and hollowed floor of stone,—a threefold halo rainbow-hued the vast interior, encompassing, clothing its dim, deep recesses in garments soft and glistening. A coloured maze called *La Lieue* winds its way in intricate design along the pavement, a penitential path for worshippers, the fifty-first Psalm graven upon its blue and white; a pavement unique in this, the slabs mark no man's grave; for, according to that old-time chronicler, Sebastian Rouillard, the "Church has this pre-eminence as being the couch or resting place of the Blessed Virgin, and in token thereof has been, even until this day, preserved pure, clean and entire, without ever having been dug or opened for any burial." The massive pillars seem to toy with the great weight imposed upon them, their sculptured capitals the chiselled crown of royalty, supporting in the olden

208 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

days a gold-hued chestnut roof, "le Forêt," so it was called, consumed by the tongued monster also a century or two ago, and replaced by metal work inferior in effect and workmanship.

The Chartres Bible, then, is written not in stone, but tells its story in the wealth of thirteenth century stained glass as rich in figures and design as the rich colour scheme of their setting, these windows numbering in all one hundred and thirty-five, inclusive of three immense roses, thirty-five of medium size and twelve small ones,—great wheels of fire telling their story, often, with flaming tongues of prophecy. The wheel of the north transept, the gift of the good Saint Louis IX., and called for him the Rose of France, depicts the glorification of the Virgin, bearing in her arms her glorious Son. It rests on five great pointed windows, the central panal representing St. Anne with the infant Virgin; while on the right Melchisedec and Aaron, types of Our Lord's priesthood; on the left David and Solomon, types also of His royal lineage. The south rose, given by a Count of Dreux, denotes the glorification of the Saviour, and in like manner it crowns the five windows just beneath. The Infant Saviour in His Mother's arms, the central panal, is flanked by four great Prophets bearing the four Evange-

lists upon their shoulders, thus symbolising the support the New Law received from the Old. Then in the western rose the story of that dread Last Judgment is written past all forgetting in the jeweled fragments welded together by the dark lines of lead, while just below are three splendid windows more, dating a century earlier than the rest. One, the "Jesse Window," justly famed; the second telling the story of Our Lord's life, as the third ends the tale with those scenes of His Passion and His Death. Above appears the resplendent figure of the Blessed Virgin, known as "Notre Dame de la Verrière." The apse is lighted also by seven great windows, crowded with figures of prophets, apostles and saints, enfolded in a cloud of scenes from Holy Writ and from the Golden Legend also.

Chartres was ever a place of pilgrimage, and to its shrine popes, kings and commoners alike made pilgrimage together. Among them good King Philip Augustus and Queen Isabella of Hainault came, in suppliant intercession that to them might be given an heir. "Whereupon," says William le Breton, "even as the Queen was making her prayer, the candles upon the high altar suddenly lighted of themselves, as if in token that her request was granted, and which accord-

210 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

ingly came to pass." In the years of those French and English wars when Edward III. pressed sore upon his cousin France, King John himself a prisoner, Edward laid siege to Chartres, despite the pleadings of the Dauphin and the demands of the Pope's Legate for peace. Froissart tells us that there "befell to the King of England and all his men a great miracle: A storm of thunder so great and horrible came down from heaven upon the English host that it seemed as if the end of the world were come, for there fell down stones so great that they killed men and horses, and so that the boldest trembled." Edward thus rebuked by heaven, vowed humbly to Our Lady of Chartres that if the storm would cease he would grant terms of peace, provided they maintained him honourably. Thus in pilgrim's garb, not as a warrior, he entered within the walls to do penance at Our Lady's shrine. Here too, before the high altar, amid the gay, bedizened throng of courtly France, King Henry of Navarre was crowned, choosing this special sanctuary of Our Lady rather than Rheims, the crowning place of France's kings from Clovis down, in token of his more complete conversion. "Thus," observed Abbé Hamson, curé of St. Sulpice, "Protestantism, which had flattered itself

with the hope of mounting the Throne of France, was broken at the feet of Our Lady of Chartres, where, also paganism had expired before it in the defeat and subsequent conversion of Rollo.”

Within the treasury of the cathedral, the sacristan will show you the fragments of the Blessed Virgin's veil, authentic past all doubt, or so it would seem, presented to the Emperor Charlemagne by the Empress Irene, and preserved in a great chest of cedarwood and gold, which after centuries, crumbling, all worm-eaten to dust, was opened by the Bishop, Monseigneur de Merinville, revealed thus for the first time, enveloped in a kind of gauze, embroidered in silk and gold, the veil of great length, woven of linen and silk thread. Replaced in a new coffer of beaten silver, it remained untouched and undisturbed until fingered by the ruthless revolutionary mob, and carried off by them to Paris, where fate preserved it in a museum until the Reign of Terror had had its day. Then did certain pious persons, obtaining possession of it, rend it into several portions that more than one church might benefit thereof, its scattered fragments to be collected later by Monseigneur de Lubersac, who returned them to their place in the cathedral. Of it the poet Maître Nicholas Gilles has written:

212 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

"Lois prinent la Sainte chemise
A la Mère Dex qui fuit prise
Jadis dans Constantinople
Precieux don en fit it noble
A Chartres un grand Roi de France,
Charles le Chauve ob nom d'enfance,
Cil roy a Chartres le donna."

So, then, we find at Chartres a glory all her own. Founded on Druid belief in Eastern prophecy, her stone work and her glass are tinged by Byzantine type and colour, her great heart enshrining an Eastern woman's veil,—Our Lady's,—under whose benediction she does rest. Her message from the East, striking directly and with telling force, is writ high where all may read, upon her sculptured portals, and flickering in the prismic lights upon her walls and massive pillars, her vaulted roof and hollowed maze-scrolled pavement, the Golden Legend set deep in jeweled wheels of coloured flame.

XI

FOUR HILL-TOWNS OF TOURAINE

I. CHINON

AS Amboise and Blois typify the luxurious period of Renaissance of royal France, so Chinon is essentially representative of that sterner feudal period when France was rent by factional wars, when might was right and ruled with gauntleted hand the down-trodden peasant serfs and vassals of that fair, green-swarded country. Even its position is feudal; for it is impregnable, dominating as it does three valleys, the Loire, the Indre and the Vienne, its grey lean flanks stretching along the narrow precipitous ridge. Upon those craggy heights one may gather still the yellow broom, insignia of that sturdy race of Plantagenet, a race that has left its hall-mark upon those scarred and battered walls,—a bit of England dwelling within the very heart of France. Once the site of a Roman fortress, Chinon dates back to the time of the Visigoths who wrested it

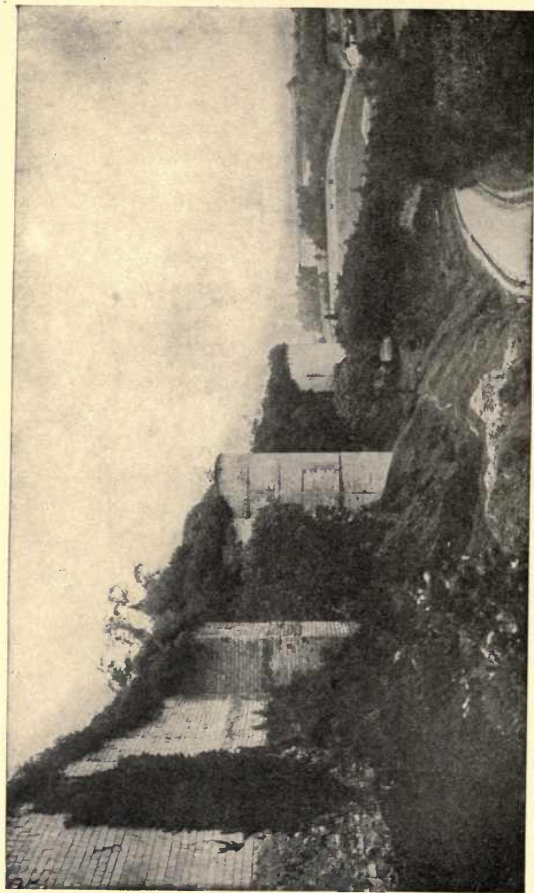
from the Romans in 463. Besieged by the Romans, the citadel was almost lost to the Visigoths when the Roman general Ægidius succeeded in cutting off the water supply. The citadel was saved, however, by the founder of the town, St. Mesme, a disciple of St. Martin, who with his monks and the citizens had taken refuge within the castle walls. St. Mesme's prayers for rain were answered, and the cisterns being once more filled with water, the besieged were enabled to hold out against the enemy, forcing the Romans at last to raise the siege. Chinon was held by the Visigoths until the fall of their leader Alaric in 481 when it came into the possession of the conquering Clovis, becoming thus a royal fortress which it continued to be until 923. From 964-1044 Chinon belonged to the fierce counts of Blois, and the three châteaux crowning the ridge were originally built by one of them, Thibaud le Tricheur. Of his work, all that remains to-day is part of the Tour du Moulin and the adjoining curtain wall known as the Château de Coudray which rises at the western end of the plateau. The ruins of the other two châteaux are of later work; one, the square stalwart Fort St. Georges built by the English Henry II., and the Château du Milieu built upon the actual foundations of the

Roman fortress by the same Henry, and later enlarged and improved by Charles VII. of France.

The town is very ancient, and in the fifth century was deemed a city and a mart of commerce. Despite its great fairs, there is to-day scarce an echo of its former importance. Its shaded streets are silent, and its moss-grown houses huddling about the château-capped ridge, or bordering the gold-blue waters of the Vienne, lie dreaming in the quiet hum of midsummer of past glories and achievements,—sure foundations upon which they might safely rest until the country's need should once more call the people to action. It is in these remote little towns of the past, perhaps, that one realises best the value of a past inheritance; for is it not the past that awakens people to action when the present calls? Yesterday the hum of life went on undisturbed, the people contented in their own narrow environment, unconcerned about the outside world and its affairs. To-day those towns are empty of men; those same people re-awakened, are taking their part in a world struggling for existence, for the ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality that is the soul of France.

When Alain, Count of Nantes, brother-in-law of Thibaud le Tricheur was dying, he confided his young son to the care of this treacherous Count

of Blois. Thibaud immediately seized half his nephew's estates, and forced his sister, the boy's mother, into a marriage with Foulques le Bon, second Count of Anjou, an act that proved the first seed sown to his own destruction; for Foulques le Bon's grandson and great-grandson, Foulques Nerra and Geoffrey Martel, finally wrested Chinon from the counts of Blois, descendants of that same Thibaud le Tricheur, in 1044. So Chinon came into the possession of the counts of Anjou and subsequently of Henry Plantagenet, King of England who built the Fort St. Georges and the great entrance gate to the Château du Milieu. Henry spent much of his time at Chinon, and finally died there in 1189 a lonely old man, deserted by all but his eldest son Geoffrey. Henry also built within the castle walls the church of St. Melaine which in its architecture bore the imprint of its English builder. In tracing the history of the counts of Anjou in their connection with Chinon, it is curious to see how in a way history repeats itself. As Thibaud filched the revenues from his nephew's estates to build Chinon, Blois and Chambord, so the brother of Geoffrey of Anjou usurped his lands, imprisoning Geoffrey in the Tour de Trésor. As an old man Geoffrey was freed through the intervention of



Exterior of Chinon

Pope Urban II., who won the co-operation of Foulques le Jeune, son of the usurping duke, revealing thus a nobler strain in these Angevin counts than in the counts of Blois.

The approach to this feudal stronghold is by a rocky road that winds up from the Place Jeanne d'Arc. So abrupt is the ascent, that the road soon dominates the narrow fringe of the town with its tortuous little streets, and comes abreast of the sheer sides of the ridge which are covered with vineyards and tiny gardens scooped out of the rocky soil. On the right rises the square bulk of the Fort St. Georges, a vast ruin now save for the crumbling outer walls which still proclaim its mediæval giant strength. Thus by a narrow winding way the road leads to the great entrance gate, the Tour de l'Horloge, reached by means of the moss-grown bridge spanning the moat. There is a stern majesty about this rugged gateway, reflectant of the feudal days that gave it birth, the entrance gate truly to those days of Renaissance which have their beginnings in the Château du Milieu with its Grand Logis of Charles VII. Within the walls all is ruin and decay, a wilderness of idle heaps of stone about which wild flowers have grown up and blossomed,

218 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

giving the effect of a neglected garden ashimmer in the June sunshine.

Of three great events that happened at Chinon, one stands out in bold relief, holding one's interest above all others,—the coming of Jeanne d'Arc and her meeting with Charles VII., an event that marked a turning point in the history of France; for through Jeanne d'Arc and her influence there was born the spirit of nationalism that was to weld France into a mighty and united kingdom, the spirit that to-day makes France great, its people of but one mind and heart. Perhaps, too, the first awakening of this spirit was partly due to English occupation; for Normandy was in fact the rude cradle of this latter day nationalism, the Norman castle being the rallying place for the protection of the people, and not merely, as in the French castles, the robber stronghold of some marauding baron.

A path leads from the gateway to the gabled end of the Grand Logis, the skeleton of what was once a two storied building, its grey walls rising from the white clover-dotted sward. On the western wall are the remains of two fireplaces, one above the other. The fireplace on the second floor was the fireplace of the Grand Salle where Jeanne d'Arc in 1428 hailed the Dauphin, Charles VII.,

as king of France, singling him out from among the large and resplendant company. One can picture the scene, the great hall alight with torches, its length and breadth guarded with men-at-arms; the throng of courtiers, the king in black standing in their midst, the most insignificant, perhaps, of all that jeweled and bedizened group; the entrance of the Maid, accompanied by those two faithful knights who had attended her on the long journey from Lorraine, the Maid facing that half hostile, half scoffing throng, unperturbed, her face aglow with faith in the divinity of her mission; her swift recognition of the king, refusing to be put off when the king denied his kingship, but kneeling before him and proclaiming him the true and lawful king of France, and giving him the promise that she would raise the siege of Orléans and see him crowned at Rheims; winning the king at last by giving him complete assurance that he was the true son of Charles VI. and not the bastard that he feared. In triumph Jeanne left the hall, passing between the bowing line of courtiers to be lodged as an honoured guest in the donjon, a noble tower rising beside the moat, and where close by a few stones mark the site of the chapel where she used to pray.

On the left of the entrance of this donjon are

220 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

some carvings attributed to the Knights Templars who were imprisoned here in 1307 by order of Philippe le Bel, who wishing to avail himself of the funds belonging to the Order, dramatically suppressed it by having every Templar in the kingdom arrested at the same moment. Jacques de Morlay, Grand Master of the Knights Templars, and a number of others were finally sent to Paris in 1312, where they were burned at the stake. This second of the three events especially touched on, occurred about one hundred years after Philip Augustus had won back Chinon after a long siege, making it once more a crown possession, which it was afterwards destined to remain.

In the same Grand Salle where Charles VII. received Jeanne d'Arc, another scene of a very different sort took place some few years later. The Dauphin, afterwards Louis XI., entering the room one day, booted and spurred, took occasion to publicly flout the mistress of the king, the beautiful Agnes Sorel. She was standing by the fireplace a little apart from the other ladies-in-waiting when he entered, and the Dauphin, striding across to where she stood, struck her full in the face with his riding glove. For this brutal act he was for a long time banished from court. Tradition

has it that Charles VII. built a house in the near-by Park Roberdeau for his beautiful mistress, but to-day no trace of it remains. After Charles VII.'s death, his son Louis XI. gave Chinon to his mother, Marie of Anjou, and in 1473 Philippe de Comines, the governor of the château, was married there to a "noble demoiselle de Chambres." He also built the beautiful church of St. Étienne which is still standing, and upon the keystone of its entrance arch is carved his coat of arms.

In 1498 the third and last great event took place at Chinon when Cæsar Borgia, the papal envoy, was received in regal state, bringing with him the Pope's pledge to annul Louis XII.'s marriage with Jeanne of France in order that the king might marry Anne of Brittany, widow of Charles VIII. One can in fancy see Rabelais in this his native town, a tiny lad crowding with the other gamin to watch Cæsar Borgia's entry, which surpassed in magnificence the triumphs of the emperors of Rome. As the Pope's envoy came laden with rich gifts, so did he depart, his greatest treasure the beautiful Jeanne d'Albret whom he promptly poisoned by sending her from Rome superb tapestried bed hangings carefully soaked in arsenic, a subtle poison from which she gradually sickened and died.

222 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

After the fifteenth century, nothing of importance occurred at Chinon. It was given to Richelieu, but he seldom used it. In 1626 a decree was issued ordering the demolition of all the castles of the interior of France, but it was never carried into effect, time alone with gentle hand obeying the royal command.

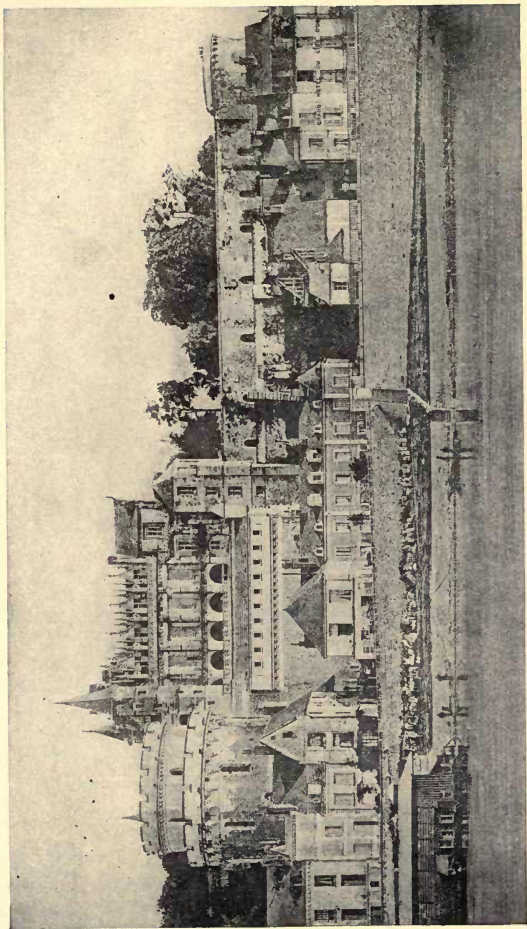
Chinon's keynote, then, is rugged strength and simplicity rather than luxury and beauty; sturdy character and not perfection of form. Feudal it is in spirit, feudal even in its position; for it dominates three valleys, and at its feet glide swiftly by the sparkling waters of the Vienne. From the Tour du Moulin of Thibaud le Tricheur one gets a wonderful sweep of this fair green country rolling away to the south and east, a fertile land full of peace tuned to the drone of bees and the sweet songs of birds that find shelter on this desolate height within its tangled garden of wild flowers and grey crumbling heaps of stone. Here in the silence at the sunset hour the mighty past passes pageant-like across those scarred heights, leaving many a tapestried picture, with none more vivid than the meeting between Charles VII. and the Maid of France, Jeanne d'Arc; for in that moment a new France was born, the spirit of nationalism that was to rise up and

be the very soul of France. The past is the earnest for the present; it lives in the soul of the future yet unborn. And these people living to-day within the shadow of Chinon's century-stained walls, and seemingly sunk in a lethargy of dreams, have in very truth once more risen at the call of France.

II. AMBOISE

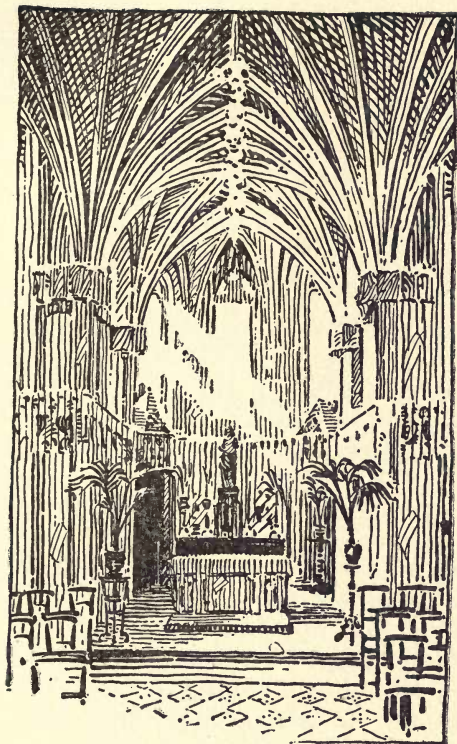
THE hall-mark of a race is stamped upon the homes of its people; and so about the royal châteaux of Touraine, one can find the keynote to the France of yesterday and of to-day. At Chinon, one sees the sterner side of that life of feudal France with its warring factions both internal and external. Amboise and Blois, on the contrary, represent that luxurious golden aftermath when kings of France held absolute power; when luxury, pleasure and the dance filled their days rather than the duties of kingship; when the cries of a people oppressed were drowned by the gay laughter of courtiers and court ladies, and by the clink of golden goblets.

Of this age of luxury and splendour, Amboise is the most perfect expression. All the daring beauty and lofty aspiration, all the delicacy and intricacy of that marvellous Age of Renaissance is stamped upon its crenellated walls and towers; while about it cling memories of black deeds, cruelties marking in strange contrast this bright age of beauty and culture, as the dark lead outlines



Amboise from the River



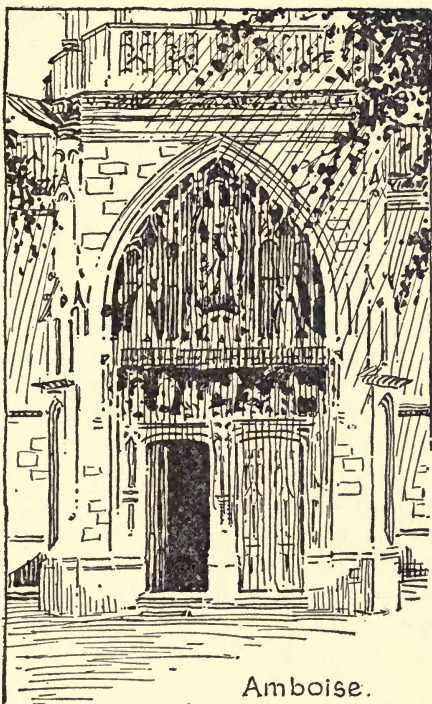


Amboise: Interior of St. Hubert's Chapel.

226 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

the glories of the stained glass image of some saint.

As it is lofty in design, so it is lofty in position, rising upon the vast pedestal of rock above the golden waters of the Loire, while about it are clustered the red-tiled houses as if seeking protection within the shadow of that pinnacled stronghold. Through the crooked, narrow streets of this tiny hill-town, one wends one's way up from the river to the château, a circuitous route that leads one to an arched gateway. Here one ascends by a vaulted passage way cut through the oldest part of the pile, the remains of the feudal fortress of the counts of Anjou, to the courtyard of the château, now a terraced garden colour-flecked with flowers. On the western edge of this garden stands the fifteenth century Gothic chapel of St. Hubert which is the architectural gem of the whole château, and is wholly French in design and workmanship having been built by Charles VIII. before his campaigns in Italy. It is an exquisite flower of the Renaissance, and was restored by Louis Philippe to its pristine freshness and beauty. Above the chapel doorway are the wonderful sculptured bas-reliefs representing the miraculous hunt of St. Hubert, the figure of the saint portrayed with the familiar



Amboise.
Doorway, St. Hubert's Chapel

228 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

stag. Other panels picture scenes from the life of the saint including his conversion. Within the chapel, which is also rich in carved finials and copings, is the tomb of Leonardo da Vinci who died at the château in 1519 whither he had come at the bidding of Francis I.

The lofty walls and ramparts of the château are flanked by three massive round towers, one of which, the Tour Minimes on the northern side, is a veritable fortress in itself. It is of such giant proportions as to admit within its walls an incline plane that winds up from its base to its summit, and is wide enough for a coach and four. The ancient apartments are cut up into small modern rooms for the use of old retainers of the Orléans family to whom since 1872 the château has belonged. The gardens perched so high above the river and covering the irregular spaces of the plateau of rock on which the castle stands, are picturesque if not extensive, and from them one gets wonderful broad vistas of sky and river and distant wooded hills,—a marvellous setting for that complicated mass of bastions and high-set windows, of balconies and crenellated walls. One of the terraces planted with clipped limes lies within the shadow of the big tower, and here tradition points to a low doorway embedded in

the thick wall at the far end where Charles VIII. struck his head against the lintel dying from the blow. Much of Charles VIII.'s short, unhappy life was spent at Amboise, the scene of his birth as well as of his death. It was at Amboise that his widow, Anne of Brittany, already stricken by the loss of her three children, spent the period of mourning for her royal husband; and there too she was wooed and won by her former lover, the handsome Louis XII., cousin and successor of Charles VIII.

Standing by the low, moss-grown parapet, and looking down upon the wide expanse of green fields and meadow lands flooded with the sunset light, the golden Loire winding its tortuous way toward the sea, a cloud of images flashes up, images that reach back to the fourth century when Amboise, then Ambatia, was under Roman domination, and a "pagan pyramidal temple" stood upon the cliff where this present Renaissance château now stands. In this far-off epoch of Roman occupation, St. Martin of Tours overthrew the pagan temple and its worship, introducing Christianity. At the end of the fifth century, 496, Clovis and Alaric the Goth met on the Isle de St. Jean, "where the two kings," so says Gregory of Tours, "conversed, ate, drank together and

230 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

separated with promises of friendship." This meeting of Clovis and Alaric marked a period in the history of France, and not long afterwards a fortified château rose upon the ruins of the pagan temple. In the ninth century, Louis le Bègue gave Amboise to the counts of Anjou. Later it fell into the hands of the counts of Berry. During the reign of Charles VII., it again became a royal possession, Charles VII. wresting it from Louis d'Amboise because of Louis' attempt to rid the court of Charles VII's favourite, the evil Georges de la Tremoille. Charles VIII., who was born and died at Amboise, and who was influenced by his sojourn in Italy occasioned by his campaigns, added many of the Renaissance details. The wonder and the beauty of Italian art aroused in the young king a great craving for culture, learning and a knowledge of art which his father's craven fear had denied him for Louis XI. was so fearful of having his power wrested from him by his young son, that the boy grew up half educated. It is not to be wondered at that Charles was carried away by the magnificence of the Italian courts and desired to transplant to France this new world of beauty he had found. The first orange trees in France were planted in the gardens of Ambroise by his Italian gardener,

Passello da Mercogliano. Amboise was assigned by Louis XII. to Louise of Savoy and her son, the young Duke of Angoulême, afterwards Francis I. It was to this time that the court made Blois its chief seat of residence, the new wing of Louis XII. having been completed. Amboise was the early home of Louis XII., and here in later years this handsome cavalier wooed the widowed Queen, Anne of Brittany. In 1499 Louis and his bride made their state entry into Amboise, an occasion of great magnificence, arranged with all the artistry of that pageant-loving age.

Francis I., the great lover of the Renaissance, who did so much for France architecturally, who gathered at his court the greatest artists of his time,—Leonardo da Vinci, Jean Goujon, Andrea del Sarto,—left the impress of his artistic instinct upon the walls of Amboise. With him we see the flood-tide of Italian influence and culture that inundated France, following the success of the French arms in Italy, and bringing with it also the miasma of Medician cruelty and intrigue when later two of the Medici were crowned queens of France; Catherine in particular using her power in ways that left many a bloodstained page in the fair history of France. The state entry of Louis XII. and his Queen into Amboise

232 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

was only excelled in magnificence by Francis I., when in 1539 he received the Emperor Charles V. there with a pomp and lavish display reminiscent of the days of imperial Rome. The great Heurtault tower was hung from foot to summit with rich tapestries, and lighted by countless torches that made the night seem bright as mid-day.

Somehow one associates the fair Mary Stuart and her handsome young husband, Francis II., with Chenonceaux, the exquisite Renaissance château spanning the Cher, rather than with Amboise. Chenonceaux, all beauty and sunshine, possesses no trace of the ominousness, the dark, insidious cruelty that impregnates the turreted walls of Amboise. One thinks of Francis II. and his young Queen in the first flush of their happiness, treading the gardens by the Cher arm in arm, flitting like gay butterflies from flower to flower. Yet their happiness was briefer than a summer's day; for to Amboise they fled to escape capture by the Huguenots. Here in the height of her power, Catherine swayed the destinies of France, caring for nothing but the accomplishment of her intrigues and ambitions. It was at Amboise that Mary Stuart received her first lessons in the finesse of Italian cruelty and intrigue, of

fanaticism and excess. History pictures her standing beside the Queen mother on the southern terrace, watching the execution of Renaudie and the other Huguenot conspirators. Later, looking down from the well-named gibbet-balcony of the Salles des Arms, where grinned the suspended heads of those same unfortunate prisoners, she saw the noyades of the captured Huguenots in the Loire,—blood-curdling scenes destined to play havoc with the vivid imagination of this beautiful young Queen, the foundation really of her fateful life.

Louis XV. gave Amboise to the Duc de Choiseul. Confiscated at the time of the Revolution, the château was given back to the Orléans family in 1872 by the National Assembly, and it is now used as a house of retreat for military veterans, and for old retainers of the House of Orléans,—that dying remnant of royal France.

In the golden glow of a summer afternoon, these mediæval horrors vanish, are lost in the mystic light of sunset. Standing upon those terraced heights that overlook the golden river winding amid the shimmering green of meadows and of pasture land, only the fair beauty of that marvellous Age of Renaissance with its culture and its artistic triumphs remains. Those darker pages

234 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

are blotted out in the dazzling brightness enveloping the age of Francis I. Drowned in sunshine, Amboise crowns the heights above the shining river aglow with the wonder, aspiration and beauty of the age that gave it birth. Scarred and weather-beaten it is, yet mellowed by the centuries that have swept over it. Its founders, its creators, the great men and women who inhabited its walls, are gone; but Amboise remains, a noble monument marking the flood-tide of the Renaissance, the Renaissance that is French in spirit and untouched by the Italian influence that a few years later inundated France.

III. BLOIS

AN atmosphere of deep tragedy broods upon Blois, pervading every corner of it, and overshadowing still all the brilliance of its past. Here one finds the grandeur, the luxurious beauty of the Renaissance without its light gaiety and joyousness. Thus does it differ from Amboise.

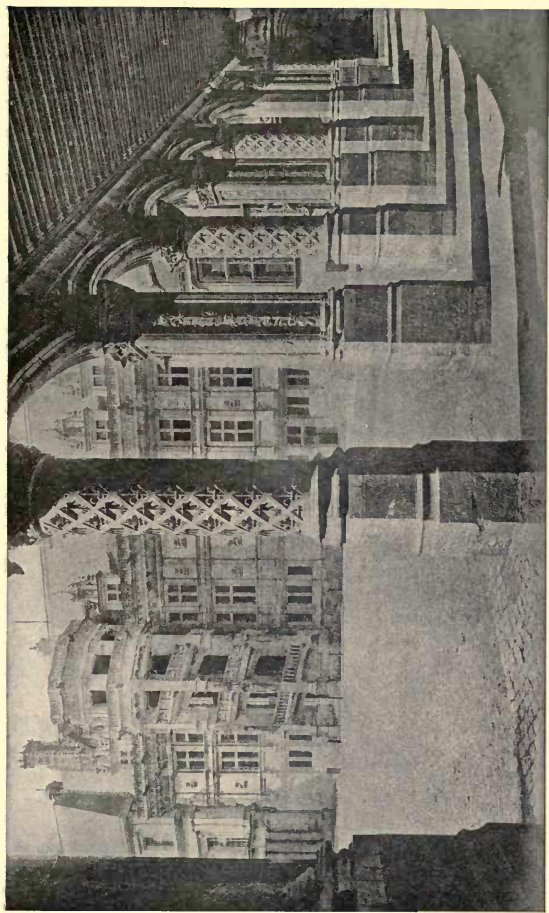
Like Amboise and Chinon, Blois dates from Roman times and was the site of a Roman fortress. It stands upon a triangular plateau high above the Loire that in ancient times washed the base of the cliff on the south and east; while on the north, a small tributary of the Loire, the Arroux, long since dried up, gave added strength to the northern side of the château. The western side was protected by a huge moat and a massive wall. Some remains of the towers guarding this wall are embedded in the neighbouring town buildings.

The history of the château may be divided into three periods: the feudal period of the counts of Blois; the period of Louis XII., and the period of Francis I. The first period is distinctly feudal,

236 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

and is associated with an early count of Blois, Thibaud le Tricheur, who built the château about the middle of the tenth century out of revenues filched from his young nephew. This early château was rebuilt by one of Thibaud's descendants in the thirteenth century, but except for the Grand' Salle, called now the Salle des États, and part of the Tour du Moulin none of these early feudal buildings remain, and Blois as it stands to-day belongs wholly to the two later periods of its history, that of Louis XII. and Francis I.

The period of Louis XII. was one of great magnificence. Louis' grandfather, the first Orléans Count of Blois who purchased the château from the counts of Blois, was murdered in Paris by order of the Burgundian Duke, Jean sans Peur. This Duke of Orléans' son, Charles the "Poet-Prince," was held a prisoner for many years in England; but in spite of Henry V.'s dying injunctions never to free him, Charles finally was released upon the payment of an enormous ransom. Charles immediately returned to France and healed the feud existing between the families of Burgundy and Orléans by marrying Mary of Cleves, niece of the reigning Duke, Philippe le Bon; and in 1462 Louis XII. was born



Château de Blois—Wing of Louis XII. The Colonnade

at Blois. The château of to-day covers but half of the site of the ancient château. The other half is now a shady square flanked on its western side by the Louis XII. wing which abuts the Grand' Salle of the counts of Blois.

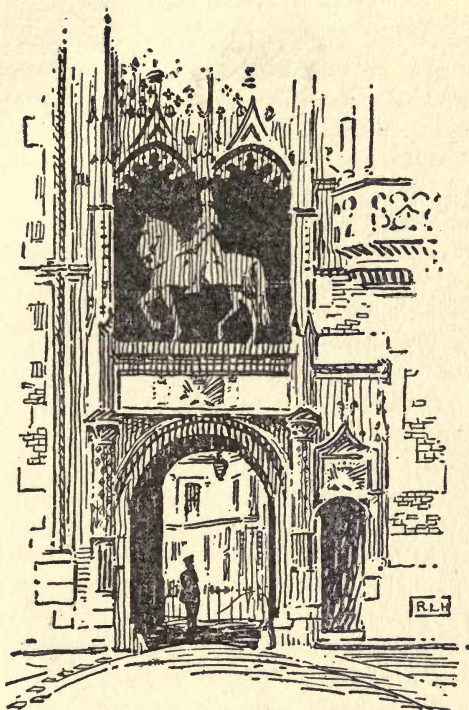
Although court life began at Blois in 1498, this wing of Louis XII. was not finished until 1502, and its completion was the occasion of a reception of great magnificence in honour of the Archduke Philip the Handsome of Spain and his wife the Infanta. The French Queen, Anne of Brittany, had a great ambition to marry her tiny daughter, the Princess Claude, to the young son of the Archduke Philip, who later was to be the powerful Emperor Charles V. In spite of Louis' opposition to a union obviously against the best interests of France because it would in the future place Brittany under the sovereignty of a foreign power, Anne for the time carried her point, and the negotiations were completed at Blois. The occasion was somewhat marred when the little princess shrieked at sight of her mother-in-law to be, and had to be removed. Later Louis broke off this match, marrying his daughter to the young Prince of Angoulême, afterwards Francis I. This wing of Louis XII. is built of small black and red bricks with facings and window frames of light

238 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

stone. Over the entrance gate is a modern equestrian statue of Louis XII., replacing the original. Everywhere one finds the entwined initials of Louis and Anne, the porcupine of Orléans and the ermine and the cordelier of Brittany. Even the great fireplaces which are a noteworthy feature of Blois, are decorated with these emblems of the royal pair.

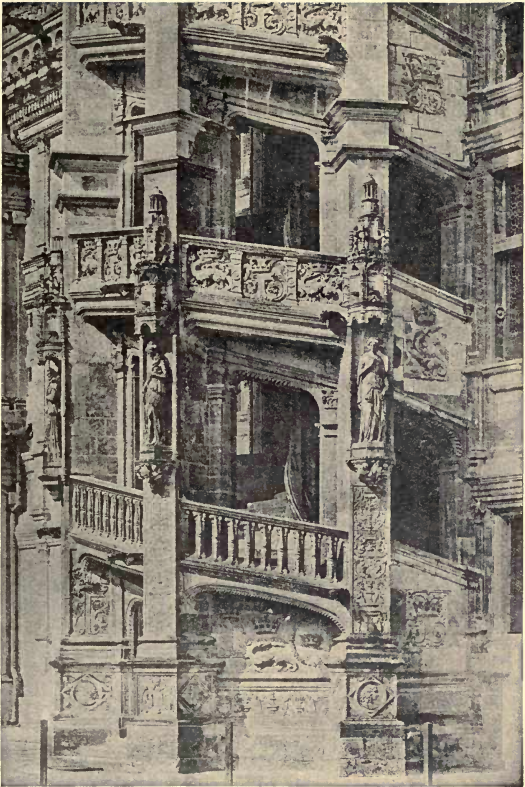
There is no symmetry in the architecture of Blois. It is an accumulation of three periods of architecture represented by as many wings,—the east wing of Louis XII. abutting the thirteenth century Grand' Salle; the north wing of Francis I.; and the west wing of Gaston of Orléans which in the seventeenth century replaced the beautiful buildings of the poet-prince, Charles of Orléans. The plan of Blois is an irregular quadrilateral with the chapel of St. Calais on the south, the three wings forming the other three sides of the great courtyard. One of the windows in the chapel represents the betrothal of Louis XII. and Anne of Brittany.

The north wing of Francis I., which occupies the site of the early feudal fortress, is the most richly decorated and superb part of the château, representative of the sumptuousness and colossal daring of the age of Francis I. as it is the final



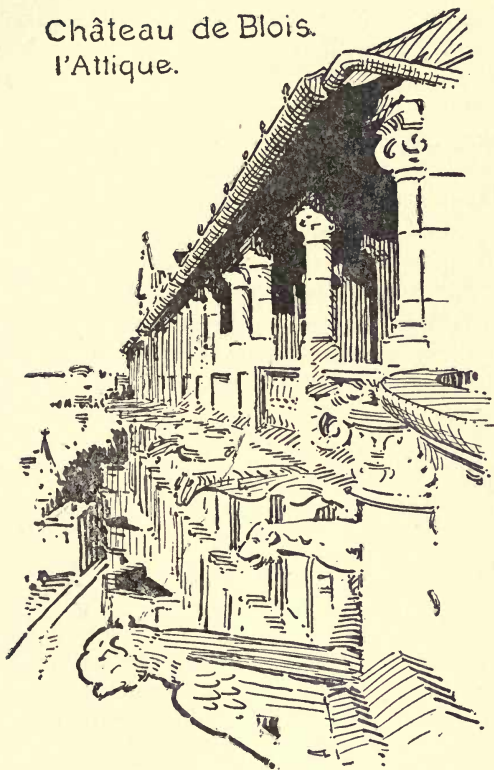
Blois.
Entrance Gate to the Château.

expression of true French Renaissance. Just as we find at Amboise in the beautiful chapel of St. Hubert a Renaissance architecture wholly French, so in this magnificent wing of Francis I., we see the rich beauty of its architecture untouched by the ornate gorgeousness that Italian influence brought in soon after, a richness combined with the fundamental differences in character of these two art-giving and art-loving nations. The exterior of the façade facing the Place Victor Hugo, consists of four stories richly decorated and adorned with turrets and an open gallery at the top. The inner façade is even richer in decoration than the outer, its chief feature being the great staircase which ascends within a projecting pentagonal tower. There is a theory that the staircase was designed by Leonardo da Vinci while he was at Amboise, taking for his model the shell of *Voluta Vespartilio*. The theory if true, and there seems no reason to doubt it, proves Leonardo a master of construction as well as a decorative artist of the highest order. The groin work reveals the power to combine perfect construction with beauty unexcelled. "The stairs wind upward," so says an old chronicler, "unfolding round an exquisite central shaft like the petals of a flower, and in the very lines of each step itself



Château de Blois, Foot of Great Staircase of Francis I.

Château de Blois.
l'Attique.



242 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

a strange and beautiful look of life and growth is produced by the double curve on which it is so subtly planned." The carving is of the finest lace work in stone, the salamander of Francis I. being frequently repeated in the design. On the staircase there are three statues of great beauty, Peace, Youth, Friendship, said to be the work of Jean Goujon, the man who "marks the culminating point of the French Renaissance: in his sculptures the Greek feeling for distinction of style and dignity in monumental decoration is reborn and combined with a delicacy, an esprit, a sympathetic rendering of feminine elegance essentially French, together with a poetry, an exuberance of joy in his child figures, and a grace and charm that was wholly personal." The inevitable decadence of art was to follow that of morals,—a decadence that came in with the Italian Catherine de Medici and the later Valois when "the fair fruit of beauty had developed into rottenness." Francis I. entertained the Emperor Charles V. here with great magnificence, and as one mounts that superb staircase, one can picture it crowded with gorgeously arrayed courtiers and ladies-in-waiting passing up and down with jest and laughter upon their lips, or, perchance, pausing to listen to a minstrel's singing a love song from the

fair land of Provence. Henry III. was the last of the monarchs to spend much of his time at Blois. During his reign he twice assembled the States-General there.

The interior of the château, though it has been restored, is bare of furniture which was destroyed or carried off during the lawless days of the Revolution. Even the rich tapestries that adorned the walls in its royal days have vanished. On the first floor interest centres about the apartments of Catherine de Medici, the most beautiful of the rooms where this powerful and evil woman dwelt being her bedchamber, where she died in 1589, with its artistically carved beams, and the study, its panelled walls—two hundred and fifty in all—covered with exquisite carvings that are all different, a gem of the Renaissance. These apartments adjoin the donjon or Tour des Oubliettes in which is the dungeon where the Cardinal de Guise, brother of the Duke was confined and assassinated. The apartments of Henry III. are on the second floor. The two ante-chambers, as in the apartments of the queen, contain fine fire-places. The king's bedchamber was the scene of the assassination by Henry's order of the Duke de Guise, called "le Balafre," in 1588, thus ending the baleful influence of Catherine de

Medici, even though it raised up more enemies than friends for the king, and in the end was his undoing. So dastardly a deed brought upon him the disgust of his friends and the implacable hatred of the Duke's powerful following.

After this time, Blois fell into disfavour, royalty being unable to abide the atmosphere of tragedy a king's cowardly spilling of blood had created. From that time on it became more of a prison or place of exile for those who seemed likely to disturb the peace of the court. Gaston of Orléans, brother of Louis XIII., was one of these, and the memory of his enforced retirement here is perpetuated in stone. Chaffing at the monotony, he amused himself by tearing down the beautiful west wing of his ancestor Charles, the "Poet-Prince" replacing it by the classic horror of Mansard, which represents the final decadent ebb of the Renaissance as the wing of Francis I. reveals the French Renaissance in the flood-tide of its virility and beauty. It is a mercy that death prevented this merry, good-humoured prince from continuing his work of vandalism which included a rebuilding of the entire château on these pseudo-classic lines. Before Gaston came into possession of Blois, his mother, Marie de Medici, was virtually held a prisoner here by order of her son

Louis XIII., who tired of his mother's plottings and intrigues with her Italian minister, Concini, with whom she shared her power as regent for seven years, banished her at last to Blois after assassinating the wily Italian. Louis was aided and abetted in this by his life-long friend the Duke de Luynes, who, loving France more even than he desired personal power, urged the king to take the power into his own hands and assert his kingship. Marie the Intrigante, was not long in plotting her escape, winning over to her cause the Duke de Épernon, who looked with no loving eye upon the growing power of the Duke de Luynes and his influence with the king.

The Salle des États is reached from the apartments of Henry III. by a staircase at the end of the Louis XII. wing. "Salle des États" is but the modern name for the ancient Grand' Salle of the counts of Blois which in the Middle Ages was the place where the sovereign assembled his vassals on the most solemn occasions,—“the scene of the entire public life of the great barons.” This noble hall like the donjon dates from the thirteenth century, and is divided in two by eight columns.

Both the lower and the upper town are ancient, and crowd about the base of the château on the

246 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

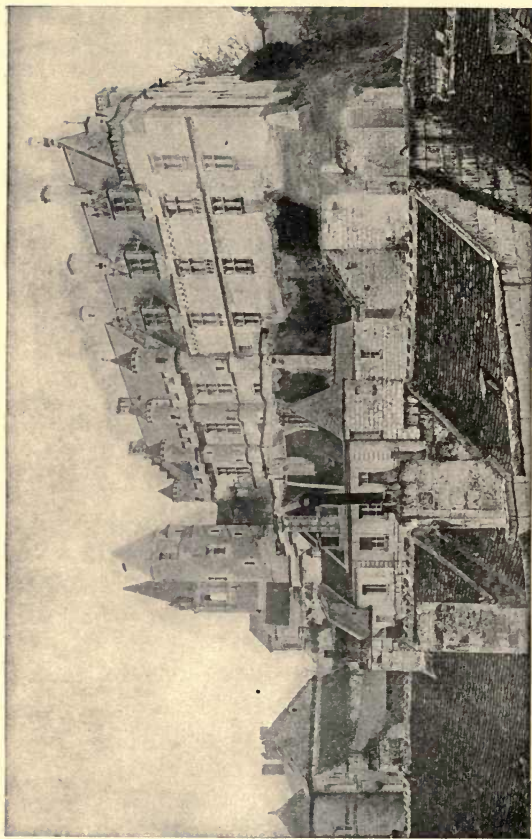
south and east. The fine old abbey church of St. Nicholas is close to the château walls, and was built by the Benedictine Convent of St. Laumier 1138-1215. In 1568 it was pillaged by the Calvinists, and was mutilated further at the time of the Revolution in 1793. The beautiful façade is flanked by two towers, and its central doorway consists of three ranks of arches adorned with some very lovely carving. The cathedral of St. Louis belongs to the decadent age of later-day Gothic, and bears also the imprint of the pseudo-classic work of Mansard, architect of the seventeenth century Gaston wing of the château. The church of St. Sauveur whither Jeanne d'Arc went to have her banner blessed before riding off to raise the siege of Orléans, has disappeared, its site marked by a tablet in the château square.

In these three châteaux of royal France, Chinon, Amboise and Blois, we see three phases of its old court life. Chinon represents the sterner feudal side, a life in keeping with the rugged strength and simplicity which is the keynote of its grim walls and towers. At Amboise one steps into that luxurious period of Renaissance, a period of beauty and of splendour that combined all the delicacies and intricacies of the marvellous age which finds its most perfect expression there. All

the gaiety and joyous exuberance of the age, all its lightness and delight in beauty for its own sake, is the keynote of that noble monument, marking as it does the flood-tide of the Renaissance. Blois, though it belongs to that same marvellous age, is pervaded by an atmosphere of tragedy that overshadows still the brilliance of its past. This shadow resting upon it, intensifies rather than dims its grandeur and luxuriant beauty. At Blois one feels the sinister that is always connected with the Italian Renaissance, and which crept in with the evil Medicis, who by their polluting touch turned to rottenness "the fair fruit of beauty" in art as well as in morals. And while the superb wing of Francis I. marks the flood-tide of the French Renaissance in all its daring beauty and lofty aspiration, Blois rests within the shadow, tragedy brooding upon its walls and towers, it being seemingly impossible for it to escape into the sunshine, a sunshine which somehow drowns the equally cruel and bloody deeds perpetrated within the walls of Amboise. Blois and Amboise represent the worship of beauty, the passionate love of art which is an integral part of the France of to-day, and an external expression. It is at Chinon that the soul of France is laid bare.

IV. LOCHES

ATMOSPHERE is a potent thing. It sets the character of a place even as the personality of a people create it. Thus in Touraine one comes under a new spell, into an atmosphere soft-brooding over the fertile valley of the Loire, its poplar-lined rivers and grey-green fields melting into the haze-dimmed distance of purpling hills set against the blueness of a southern sky. Touraine is the heart-beat of France, the very life-blood of her being, breathing forth the sweet fragrance of the locust blossom and of roses, as she stands at the threshold of the Provençal country; catching the rich, cadenced singing of the troubadours, the rippling of silver streams, the wild nomad airs even of the desert, of the East. Touraine was the country seat of royal France, and about her gay, bedizened court gathered not only the flower of chivalry, but also the most highly cultured minds of the great Middle Age, when the mailed hand of feudalism clasped the baby fingers of awakening art: in Touraine the French Renaissance had its birth. Contact with foreign elements,—Italy,



Loches

the East,—brought about this awakening, and above the rude cries of battle burst forth a hymn to beauty, the heart-cry of a people longing to create, to fashion something beyond implements of war and plain-faced strongholds of defence.

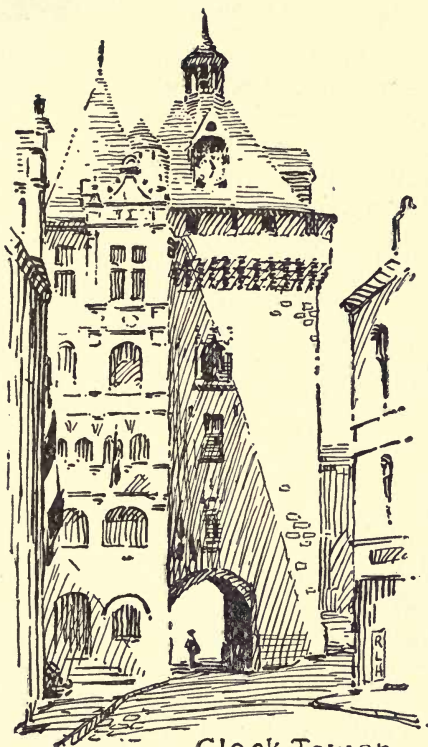
The people of Touraine are a swarthy race, of different type and build from their stalwart Norman neighbours, gay, impressionistic, dreamy, passionate, bold fighters; and with their Provençal nimbleness of versification and of song, charming lovers also; the nucleus, indeed, of the French nation of to-day. The foreign wind that blew across the Apennines into France, fanned their quick blood to the boiling point, and thus along the river ways of the Loire, the Cher and the Indre there rose the residential château of the Renaissance, outgrowth of feudalistic days and of an unquenchable desire to create in stone as well as on canvas something beautiful,—a desire, in short, to refine crude, primitive attempts into masterpieces of highly finished art. At Loches we find the elemental beginnings of the ninth and eleventh centuries rising side by side with the elaborate finishings of the Renaissance of the sixteenth century. A towered city, Loches crowns the steep, chalk cliff, once the site of a Roman camp, and overlooking the green valley of the

250 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

Indre, spreading out at its feet ashimmer in golden sunlight of budding May; the sky shot with billowy fleece-clouds, the air vibrant, even in the noonday stillness, with pulsing mellowness, with passion, dormant perhaps, yet smouldering still beneath the ivy-set walls. They, towered and turreted, outline the rugged steep with grim defiance, exultant in their strength even to cruelty; yet Cuchulain-like, swift as a woman's tenderness to clasp the nestling, grizzled town close to their heart with proud, calm confidence in their ability to protect it against all foes; the little, clambering town that dwells secure within these moat-encircled walls, its stumbling chimneys stretching in humble supplianee towards the great château. The château is surrounded by a second entourage of walls that set it distinct and apart in good old feudal fashion, even while it binds in bonds of vassalage and fealty. Here on the heights the work of the ninth and the eleventh centuries and that of the late Renaissance clusters about the collegiate church of St. Ours, whose dome-capped roof bespeaks that almost sinister touch of the Orient lingering amid the green meadows and along the sedge-lined rivers of Touraine. This imprint of an alien hand is found likewise in the rich rudeness of the sculpturings



Loches—Door of Saint Ours Church



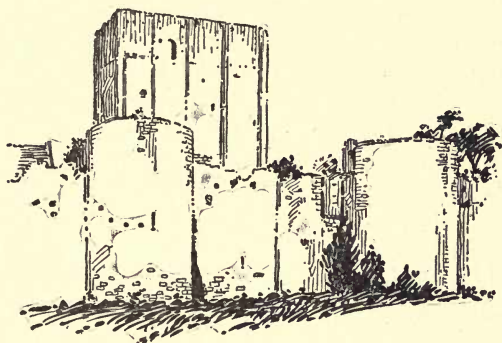
Clock Tower
Loches.

252 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

that crown its main portal and emboss its holy-water basin, formed of an altar, with figures of warriors, reminiscent of those warriors of the Cross, perchance, who strove to gapple with the East and to lay low the crescent banner of the Moslem hosts. While the crusaders ultimately failed in permanently holding Jerusalem, yet they brought back with them new ideas and an architectural knowledge absorbed from their contact with the Orient that has left its mark on church and château alike. St. Ours was built on the site of a fifth century monastery, and from earliest times was under the direct jurisdiction of the Pope, and therefore not under the supervision of any French bishop.

One finds here the pointed style of the South rather than of the north, a style devised especially to support domes,—domes that at Loches are octagonal in form, rising in straight-lined cones of stonework impressive in their solemn dignity of mien. Calm they are, almost to impassiveness, brooding over the twofold life that unravelled day by day upon the crested hill,—life at the royal château, gay, careless, free; and life across the terraced garden at the Martelet and the Tour Ronde, grim, heartrending, captive: the life of the troubadour singing of love upon the moonlit

battlements; and the life of the prisoner chanting of despair in the dim twilight of his prison cell, as he beats hopelessly against the iron bars of his captivity. Norman influence is seen, too, in the rounded arches of the nave, built over the pointed arches of a century earlier, an influence that was



The Donjon, Loches.

brought to bear when the château came into the possession of the Plantagenets in the eleventh century through Geoffrey's marriage with Mathilda, the daughter of Black Foulques of Anjou. The terror of the Black Foulques of Anjou lingers still amid the grass-grown walls and along the peaceful waterways of Touraine; and on winter nights, when the wind, fast in the grip of a wild

254 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

storm, shrieks round the donjon keep and those grey towers of direful memories, the peasants hush their talk, crossing themselves as they, pale-eyed, listen to the spirits who, so cruelly done to death, go crying down the valley demanding vengeance. Black Foulques was a worthy predecessor of Louis XI., who was to carry on Foulques' work of fiendish cruelty to the refining point of art, and who likewise spent his last days pursuing peace and finding none. Louis XI. walled up his confessor in the crypt of St. Ours, his evil conscience eating out his heart with fear and suspicious dread lest the priest from whom he dared not withhold his sins might betray him. Yet about the altar a brighter memory lingers; for it was there in the presence of courtly France, that James V. of Scotland pledged his troth with Madeleine of France, thus binding together the rugged, heather-tinted moors and the sunny fields of Touraine. Their daughter, Marie Stuart, came to France to become the bride of Francis II., a beautiful girl, her effervescent nature full of the sunshine and gaiety of the South; yet her after-years were touched to fatality with the stern, tragic note of the Scottish hills.

John Lackland lost Loches with the rest of his French possessions, Philip Augustus capturing it

for a second time in 1204. From that time, except for a lapse of fifty years in the fourteenth century when it again reverted to the English, it remained a crown possession. Charles VII. began the royal château, completing the Gothic tower, the rest of the château being subsequently finished by Louis XII. Loches, however, never lost its Norman sturdiness despite its Tourainian birth; its strategic position and the defences show the master mind of the Norman builder.

A dual personality pervades Loches, that of the mild Charles VII., whose spirit lingers about the royal château; and that of the relentless Louis XI., who, in spirit at least, dwelt under the shadow of the donjon, the evil in him glutting itself upon the imposed sufferings of victims who had fallen into his clutches. There seems no light to relieve the blackness of his nature, no softer side of appeal, no imprint of a woman's touch that with Charles VII. redeemed much that was base, weak and vicious in him; for it was Agnes Sorel who, holding the very destiny of France in her slim fingers, turned his irresoluteness into the channel of firm resolution, welding the kingdom of France into a united whole, stilling the tumultuous unrest that the long English domination had produced. A woman's courage, of a truth, stood be-

256 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

tween France and ruin; a woman's beauty held for the moment the fickle heart of the king; a woman's heart yearned for her torn and bleeding country, and Agnes Sorel, "la Belle des Belles," yielded herself the needed sacrifice, and France was saved. Her life was spent much in deeds of charity, and when she died she left a large sum of money to the monks of St. Ours, in which church she was buried. Her tomb, which was removed to the Gothic tower during the Revolution, is surmounted by a white marble figure of herself, two angels kneeling at her head, her feet resting upon a pair of lambs couchant,—delicate tribute to the woman who in purity of heart yielded up even her honour, however wrongfully, a willing sacrifice on the altar of her country.

Across the court, overshadowed by a giant chestnut tree, is a low doorway that leads into the tiny oratory of Anne of Brittany, its walls carved by a skilled hand, Anne's arms, the ermine and the cordelier, covering the entire surface. All the beauty and art of the Renaissance is portrayed in this little gem of florid perfection, the chisel of Italian art imprinted there. The oratory was built for Anne by her husband, Louis XII., while he was finishing the château begun by Charles VII., and it was in his reign, that the influence of the Italian



Loches—Château Royal—Tomb of Agnes Sorel

Renaissance began to be poignantly felt in France. Italy was at the flood-tide of this movement, and the French, returning from the Italian wars, carried the spark back with them that was to set the inflammable French imagination alight. While Louis XII. was embellishing his château, his prisoner, Ludovico Sforza, "il Moro," the Milanese duke, at whose court Louis had first been dazzled with the glories of the Renaissance, was whiling away the bitter hours of his captivity by decorating his prison walls with carvings and inscriptions, a touch of the Renaissance penetrating thus into the very heart of a feudalistic dungeon. Here this lover of art and of beauty, this man accustomed to the luxury and refinement of an Italian court, ate out his heart and died amid the rude barrenness of mediævalism, in the cold twilight gloom of his narrow prison cell. Tradition hints of a blocked doorway that was found in one of these rock-hewn dungeons, which when broken through, revealed the armoured figure of a knight sitting upon a rude stone bench, the figure in right ghostly fashion sinking swiftly, crumbling into dust before the eyes of the horror-stricken discoverers. No clue of this man's history remains save the slim thread that records the incarceration by Louis XI. of several rebellious noblemen.

258 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

Louis, if the tale be true, doubtless took keen pleasure in watching them grow thin and wan from hunger and tortured sensibility, an agony of mind that suffering sharpens rather than dulls. His love of cruelty amounted almost to mania, and he even had an underground passage built between the château and the Tour Ronde that he might more easily reach the dungeons, and thus spend his hours in idleness, if he so chose, twitting his prisoners mewled up in their cramped cells, or suspended in cages from the ceiling,—cages too small to either lie down or stand up in. These fiendish inventions were conceived by William of Harancourt, Bishop of Verdun, who was forced later to put them to the test himself along with Jean de Balue and Philip de Comines.

Yet as one stands in the inner court encircled by these great towers, and shadowed by the donjon keep, the sunlight in rich, golden mellowness resting upon the flower-grown crannies of the mouldering walls, or playing upon the flame-coloured wild roses that cluster in the bright garden patch edged with green, we feel the softening touch that time has laid upon even the barbarities of Louis XI. Linger in the June air redolent with flowers, we catch the love song of some warbler, the young troubadour of Provence



Loches, Oratory of Anne of Brittany

singing to his lady love with all the gay abandon of the old days. His is the note of joyous gaiety that lingers amid the peace of crumbling greatness, this note melodising and dominating the mournful cawing of the rooks circling about the deserted towers haunted with tragic memories, memories that recall the rude cradle of our nationalism: for it is these memories that forge another link in the chain of history following the waterways of France.

Thus to delve into the secret past, and to reveal the pages of history, is to follow down the most fascinating of roads, the road to yesterday, the yesterday accountable so largely for our to-day,—the imprint of the future branded there. And the road? Where do we find its beginnings, and how do we know it from the myriads of others branching out poplar-lined, allurements lurking in every curve of its windings? Perhaps from the very fact of its maze-like qualities, its atmosphere of mystery and romance that time has heightened rather than dispelled. If we turn the musty pages carefully one thing will impress itself upon us, that as far as the historic past is concerned, the path lies along the waterways, the broad highway in ancient times connecting not only cities and far distant towns and villages, but leading

260 THE HILL-TOWNS OF FRANCE

out also to the unhorizoned sea where fortune tossed her golden apples for the bold adventurous spirit, and where supremacy has been contended for even down to our own day. So, if you would learn the history of France, her deepest tragedies and her most highly-coloured romances; if you would see in perfection the two greatest powers of her Middle Age, her magnificent cathedrals and abbeys and her giant castles rising amid their century-stained hill-towns, follow the rivers,—the Seine, the Loire, the Rance, the Lot and the many others that one might name,—those serpentine of silver bound in green, lined by the tall, calm poplars; reflectant too, in their waters, the flux and reflux of a nation's history; rising to flood, then ebbing but to rise continually,—the Mascaret coming with sudden swiftness: then the fall.

THE WORKS OF SAMUEL BUTLER

- The Note-Books of Samuel Butler, Author of "Erewhon."** Selections arranged and edited by HENRY FESTING JONES. New Edition, with an Introduction by FRANCIS HACKETT, and a portraitnet, \$2.00
- Alps and Sanctuaries of Piedmont and the Canton Ticino.** New edition with the author's revisions. Edited by R. A. STREATFEILD. With 85 drawings chiefly by the author.....net, 2.00
- Life and Habit.**.....net, 1.50
- Unconscious Memory.** A new edition with an Introduction by Prof. MARCUS HARTOG....net, 1.50
- The Way of All Flesh.** A novel. With an Introduction by WILLIAM LYON PHELPS.....net, 1.50
- Erewhon, or Over the Range.** With an Introduction by FRANCIS HACKETT.....net, 1.50
- Erewhon Revisited, Twenty Years Later, both by the Original Discoverer of the Country and His Son.**.....net, 1.50
- Evolution Old and New.**.....net, 1.50
- A First Year in Canterbury Settlement.**.....net, 2.00
- The Humor of Homer and Other Essays.** Edited by R. A. STREATFEILD. With a Biographical Sketch of the author by HENRY FESTING JONES, and a portrait.....net, 1.50
- The Fair Haven** (as by the late JOHN PICKARD OWEN). Edited, with an Introduction, by R. A. STREATFEILD.....net, 1.50
-

E. P. DUTTON & CO.
NEW YORK

WORKS OF W. H. HUDSON

THE PURPLE LAND

INTRODUCED BY
THEODORE ROOSEVELT

James M. Barrie says: "It is one of the choicest things of our latter day literature."

Galsworthy says: "Hudson in that romantic piece of realism, 'The Purple Land,' has a supreme gift of disclosing not only the thing he sees, but the spirit of his vision. Without apparent effort he takes you with him into a rare, free, natural world, and always you are refreshed, stimulated, enlarged, by going there. A very great writer, and—to my thinking—the most valuable our Age possesses." *Net, \$1.50*

A SHEPHERD'S LIFE

In "A Shepherd's Life" Hudson takes us into a quaint old-fashioned world, that of the shepherds of the bleak South Downs of England, where in sheltered folds of the naked plains nestle placid little old-world villages, shaded by immemorial trees and surrounded by quiet, forgotten streams.

Net, \$2.50

A CRYSTAL AGE

WITH A CRITICAL APPRECIATION BY
CLIFFORD SMYTH, Litt.D.

The N. Y. *Evening Post* says, "It has the zeal of the open air, kinship with beauty of all sorts, and a relieving glint of humor."

Net, \$1.50

IDLE DAYS IN PATAGONIA

The late Prof. William James, of Harvard, gives high praise to this particular book, and says of the author, "A man who can write."

Net, \$1.50

NATURALIST IN LA PLATA

New Edition in Press

ADVENTURES AMONG BIRDS

New Edition in Press

BOOKS *by* BOYD CABLE

The books by this young artillery officer have probably given the English speaking world a better understanding of the intimate details of the Great War than anything else that has been written. Cast for the most part in the form of fiction, and written for the most part within sound of the German guns, they have an atmosphere of reality that no mere work of the imagination can possess.

BETWEEN THE LINES *Net \$1.50*

An attempt to convey the living humor or the glory that lies *between the lines* of the cold and formal official despatch.

ACTION FRONT *Net \$1.35*

These are the words that swing the muzzles of the advancing guns towards the enemy. More stories that give you a respect for Thomas Atkins that borders on affection.

DOING THEIR BIT *Net \$1.00*

A vivid description of the way the munition workers in Britain are backing the boys in the trenches.

GRAPES OF WRATH *Net \$1.50*

Twenty-four hours of a "big push." What it feels like to be a private soldier for just one day of a modern battle. As heart lifting as the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* from which the title is taken.

E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK CITY

*The Inspiration of the German People when
they awake from their present Nightmare.*

The Coming Democracy

By HERMANN FERNAU

An examination, searching and merciless, of Germany's mediæval dynastic and political system, by the author of "Because I Am a German," and a demand for reforms which all civilized countries of the world have enjoyed for decades.

"The book is one of the most important which the war has produced."—*The Spectator*.

"We recommend the book to every serious reader as one of the foremost books of universal and permanent value thus far inspired by the great war."—*New York Tribune*.

"A most remarkable book, an incisive summary of the entire Teutonic situation, a book whose conclusions are identical with President Wilson's reply to the Pope."—*Newark Evening Call*.

Net \$2.00

E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK CITY

PASSED BY THE CENSOR

BY

WYTHE WILLIAMS

of the *New York Times*

Paris in War-time; the Trials of the U. S. Embassy; the Fighting on the French Front; the Soul and Organization of regenerated France; as seen by the Paris Correspondent of the *New York Times*, who was officially accredited to the French Armies on the Western Front, and was three times on the actual fighting front, as well as in a French military prison for trying to get there before he received a pass.

Here is the real story of those early days of the war; those days of confusion, of conflicting rumor, and of fear; when the German hordes swept down on the Paris they had doomed.

Net \$1.50

E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK CITY

A Student in Arms

BY
DONALD HANKEY

Published originally in the columns of the London *Spectator*, these short articles, sketches, and essays, written by a man in the trenches, form a "war-book" of quite unusual kind, dealing with the deeper things of human life.

The high spiritual idealism which actuates so many thousands in the ranks of the Allies finds a voice in it, and the mental attitude of the fighting-men towards religion, the Church, their officers and their comrades, is exhibited not only with sanity and sympathy, but with a fine simplicity of language and an inspiring nobility of outlook.

*Twenty-four thousand copies of this book
were sold in the first month of
its publication in England*

Net \$1.50

E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK CITY

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

OL JAN / 3 1997

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 025 565 3

